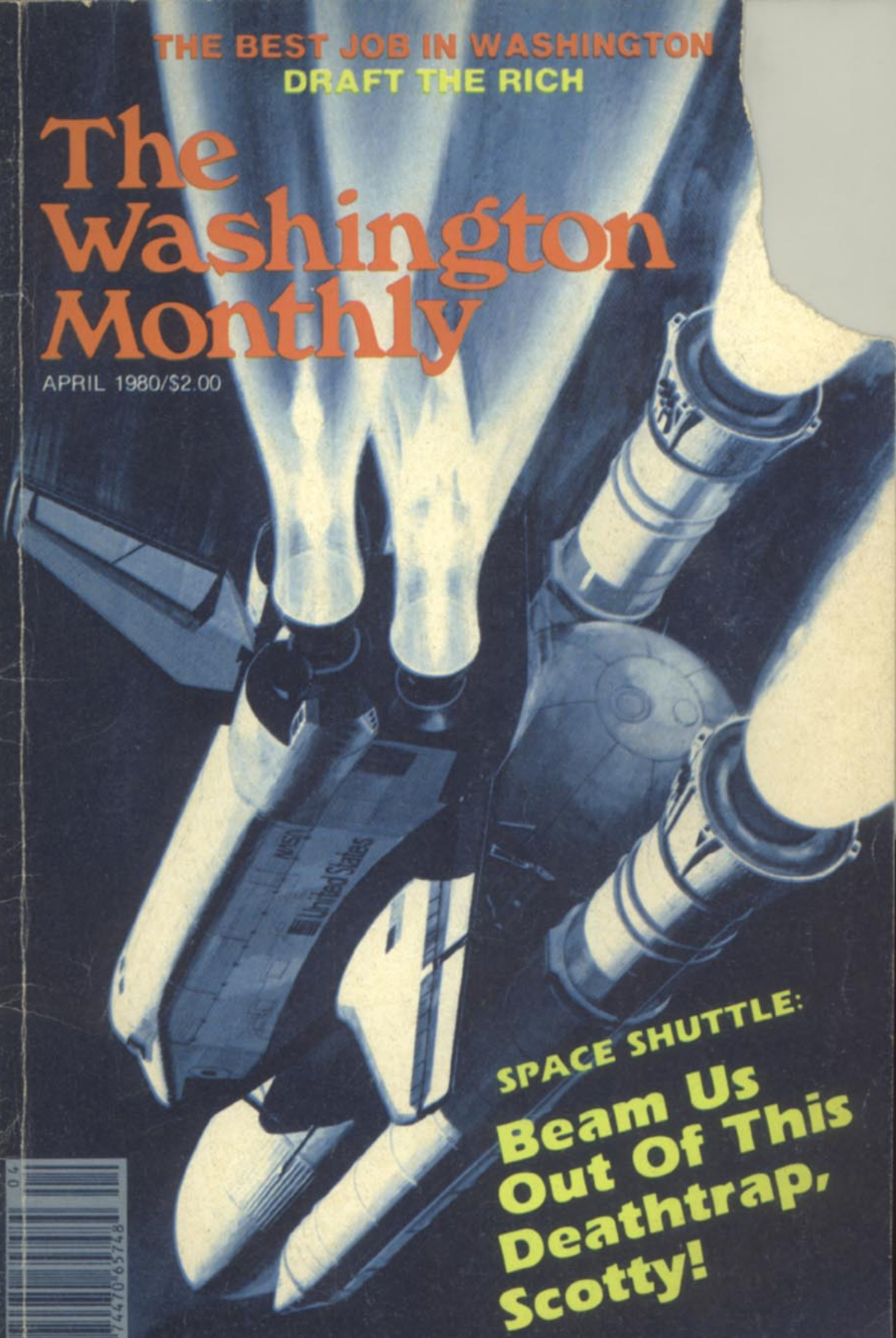
THE BEST JOB IN WASHINGTON

DRAFT THE RICH

The Washington Monthly

APRIL 1980/$2.00



SPACE SHUTTLE:

Beam Us Out Of This Deathtrap, Scotty!

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Myth:

Trucks move most efficiently on public highways.

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Mile for mile and pound for pound, today's freight railroads are up to four times more fuel-efficient than big trucks. Shippers recognize this advantage. That's why piggybacking truck trailers and containers is the fastest-growing segment of the rail freight business.

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Congress' watchdog, the General Accounting Office, said in a blistering July 1979 report: "Excessive truck weight is a major cause of highway damage. The rate of highway deterioration will slow down if excessively heavy trucks are kept off the highways...A five-axle tractor-trailer loaded to the current 80,000 pound federal weight limit...has the same impact on an interstate highway as at least 9,600 automobiles."

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Surprise:

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Letters

A Lesson on Jesse

Your article about Jesse Jackson ["I Am Somebody!" by Clarence Page, February] is an exercise in journalistic confusion. Jackson promises to motivate students; according to Page, he does. Is it too much to expect the schools, and not Jackson, to build on this motivation by educating students?

The accompanying piece on Marva Collins ["Those Who Can Teach, Do" by Magda Krance] describes another in a long history of remarkable black female teachers who educated students privately against the odds. Collins should be appreciated, but the comparison to Jackson is disjointed. Jackson has never, to my knowledge, pretended to be a teacher. He promises to create a climate in which teaching can take place. Preliminary evaluations indicate he can do just that, which is why Joe Califano pressed for long-term HEW funding of Jackson's organization, PUSH-Excel.

Whatever the value, or lack thereof, of Jackson's political statements, just because he proposed PUSH-Excel he should not be automatically restricted to one particular role.

MARY F. BERRY
Washington, DC

Ms. Berry is former assistant secretary of Education at HEW.

A Lesson on Unions

In reply to January's "Tilting at Windmills," I admit it is ridiculous for a union to forbid administrators from observing potential teachers in action. If I were a member of that union, I would work diligently to do away with such a rule.

But this does not excuse administrators from their responsibility to weed out those teachers who are sliding by before they become tenured. It's been my experience that many administrators are too insecure or too busy to take the time and trouble that firing someone requires. To lay the blame for poor teaching solely on the teachers' unions is preposterous.

LUCINDA FISHER
Mullan, Idaho

The editor replies:

I don't blame the unions alone. The education bureaucracies and the teachers' colleges share responsibility for the decline of teaching.

Catholic Taste

I enjoyed "Making It in the Church" by Joseph Nocera [January]. I appreciate his de-frocking of myths.

After any de-frocking, there may be the appearance of chaos and the like. Ultimately, any institution worthy of the agreement which gave it birth in the first place will be strengthened by de-frocking, and aided in performing the task for which it was created.

WILLIAM LYLE PERLMAN
Chicago, Illinois

"Making It in the Church" reminds me of George Orwell's discussion of the Communist Party in *1984*:

"The essence of oligarchical rule is not father-to-son inheritance, but the persistence of a certain worldview and a certain way of life, imposed by the dead upon the living. A ruling group is a ruling group so long as it can nominate its successors. The Party is not concerned with perpetuating its blood but with perpetuating itself. Who wields power is not important, provided that the hierarchical structure remains always the same."

RODNEY WRIGHT
St. Louis, Missouri

"Making It in the Church" is such a shoddy collection of Andrew Greely-like shibboleths about the Catholic church that one scarcely knows where to begin, but its incredible simple-mindedness would be a good starting point. Biship Kelly left the priesthood because he wanted to protest injustice and his superiors didn't like it. Cardinal Baum is successful because he's an ordinary sort of person who doesn't rock the boat. What a simplistic view of life this is!

Does Nocera know that in 1971, the year Kelly left, Baum visited Philip Berrigan in federal prison in Missouri? Does he know *anything* about the real Cardinal Baum? Baum is not known for his general love of the good life, as Nocera claims. Those who know him consider him a compassionate pastor and brilliant theologian. And what's wrong with the fact that Baum became friends during Vatican Council II with a Polish priest named Wojtyla? The only thing this indicates to me is that the future Pope saw something in Baum that Nocera didn't.

Nocera says the U.S. Catholic Conference has only one "genuinely important project," the Campaign for Human Development. In fact, it has many. Its Migration and Refugee Services, for example, has since World War II found homes and jobs in this country for more than one million displaced persons from all over the

(Continued on page 5)

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Strategic Implications of the All-Volunteer Force

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by Kenneth J. Coffey

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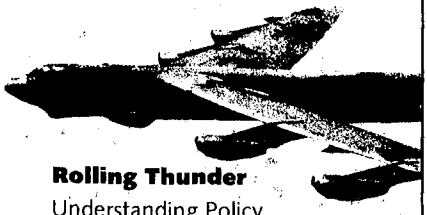

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APRIL 1980

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When we stop saving and investing

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West Germans save about fifteen percent of their disposable income, and their annual rate of productivity growth is five and a half percent. Japan's productivity is increasing nine percent a year. The Japanese people save twenty-five percent of their diposable income. But in the United States, where the rate of productivity growth is now almost non-existent, Americans save less than six percent of their disposable income. In effect, we have stopped investing in our future.

The money from savings and investments is used to purchase new plant and equipment and to replace aging facilities. Many American plants are decades older than those of foreign competitors. Without re-investment of capital, our rate of productivity will continue to decline and so will our standard of living. Without capital, jobs cannot be created, and existing jobs are threatened.

If the United States is to compete with other nations—in our own markets and in international trade—disincentives to saving and investing by Americans must be removed. Tax laws need immediate revision. Amway Corporation, Ada, MI 49355.

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One of a series of messages to stimulate public dialogue about significant national issues.

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Letters

world, including well over half the refugees from Southeast Asia in the last five years.

WILLIAM RYAN
Washington, DC

Mr. Ryan is a public affairs official for the U.S. Catholic Conference.

I took up Nocera's "Making It in the Church" with appropriate skepticism. I would like to congratulate him for a crisp, honest, and sincere piece of journalism.

His evaluation of the state of the priesthood is accurate and critically sympathetic. His identification of lack of support and rapport between bishops and their priests and his fingering "toadyism" as the method of men on the fast track could not be more correct.

His one error involves the common misconception that secular priests take a vow of poverty. They do not. Only "religious" priests, members of the orders and institutes, do.

My thanks for printing the piece. Nocera has done a service to the church that reared him.

THE REVEREND PAUL E. DINTER
New York, New York

Rev. Dinter works in the Office of the Counselor to Catholic Students at Columbia University.

"Making It in the Church" not only stretches a truism to vulgar lengths, but errs in so many points of detail that even its trite thesis is weakened.

Of course advancement in the Catholic church depends on ability, knowing people, and being in the right place at the right time.

Nocera goes on to make, by my count, 18 errors of simple fact. Most American parishes, for instance, have one or two priests on the staff. An average chancery will employ fewer than ten priests. Nocera says "a few hundred." If that were true, there wouldn't be any priests left in the average diocese to staff the parishes. Pastors are called "parish priests" in some Eastern dioceses; their junior colleagues are known as "associates," "curates," or "assistants." In most large dioceses, a man will become a pastor only after many years as a curate in many parishes.

The North American College in Rome does not give degrees in canon law, as Nocera claims, and seminarians do not pursue such degrees. Canon law is an advanced specialization. Cardinals are not "allowed to join the College of Cardinals" any more than cabinet secretaries are "allowed" to join the cabinet.

THE REVEREND MICHAEL SLUSSER
Minneapolis, Minnesota

The author replies:

My chief regret about the article turns out to be a flaw none of the letter writers mentioned. I did not give Jean Jadot enough credit for taking steps to circumvent the usual ladder of success in the American church. He has gone to extraordinary lengths to bring at least some measure of new and vital leadership to the church.

Rev. Slusser feels that I didn't get my facts straight, but it seems to me more a matter of interpretation. He complains that I assign too many priests to the parish and chancery levels. In the cities of the East Coast with which I am familiar, the numbers I listed are accurate. Perhaps I should have made a larger point of the fact that the church is a diverse institution. The church in Minneapolis and the church in New York are as different as, well, Minneapolis and New York.

Slusser also complains about my terminology. It seemed to me appropriate—indeed, necessary—to simplify language whenever possible and use lay terms that both Catholics and others would understand.

The complaint that the North American College does not grant degrees in canon law, or that seminarians do not pursue such degrees, seems to me an extreme bit of nit-picking. The former is like saying someone who went to Pembroke could never cross the street and pursue a speciality at Brown; the latter implies that seminarians do not pursue degrees, which is, of course, ludicrous.

Ryan makes a more serious charge, that my characterization of Baum is unfair. Again, it is a matter of interpretation. I mentioned, for example, that Baum has a reputation as a brilliant theologian. But that leads precisely to the point I was trying to make. It was not an article about whether Baum has won the respect of his peers—of course he has—but about whether he has won the respect of his subordinates. I did not interview his fellow bishops. I did talk to parish priests, nuns, and lay people in the diocese. Their attitude toward him is far less than laudatory. Where Baum fails is not in his relations with other men of his ilk, but his ability to lead his subordinates—to "inspire and invigorate a religious community," as I wrote. If Ryan spent less time hanging around with bishops and more time in the company of the parish priests of Washington, he might have noticed the same thing.

Finally, with respect to the U.S. Catholic Conference's Migration and Refugee Services, I was wrong.

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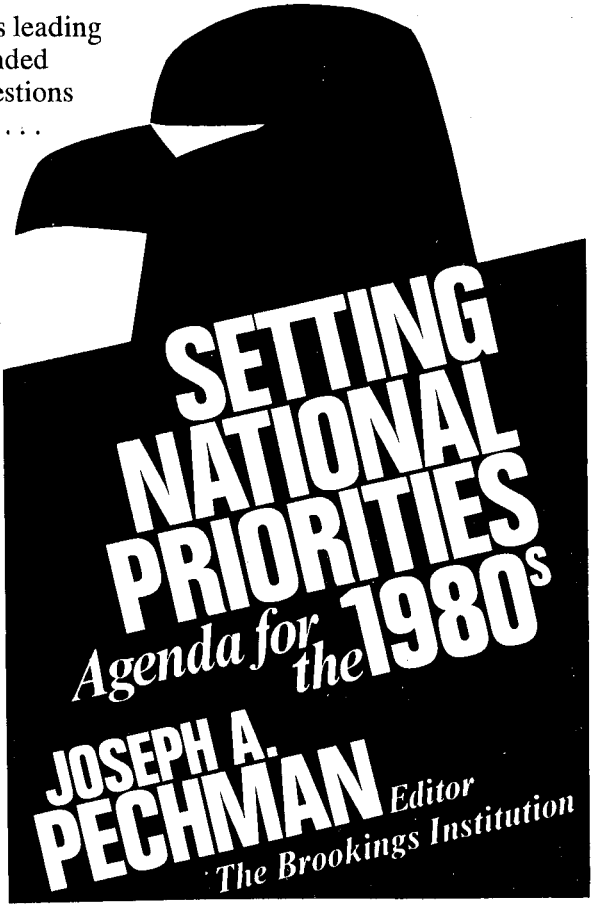

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Tilting at windmills

One concern about Carter's proposed budget cuts is that even their minimal effect on inflation won't be felt until next year. Another is that they will come in the wrong places, eliminating essential spending instead of waste. I have a solution to both problems. Carter should require that government expenditures in the last quarter of this fiscal year not exceed the average of those in the three preceeding quarters. The reason is, as government insiders know, that the greatest waste occurs during the last quarter, when bureaucrats desperately shovel out this year's appropriation in order to justify their budget request for next year. The potential saving is illustrated by HUD, which last year spent 47.2 percent of its annual budget in the last two months of the fiscal year. . . .

•

In early March came the news that Pakistan had rejected our offer of $400 million in military aid. Pakistan is obviously angling for a better deal, but my advice to the administration is take the rejection and run.

Aid to Pakistan might help Russia rather than deter it, for Pakistan would probably use its increased military strength, as it has so often in the past, against the Baluchi and Pushtun tribesmen whose help we need in Afghanistan. This is the kind of on-the-ground reality that the global thinkers back in Washington almost always miss. If they've ever been to Pakistan, it was to only two or three cities, where they never came near the tribesmen who straddle the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Baluchistan is, in fact, what stands between the Russians in Kabul and the Arabian Sea. . . . We have to take Russian expansionism seriously, and it may be necessary, for solid historical principles, to take a stand in the Middle East.

But let's do it for the right reasons. Surely the wrong reason is oil. With strict rationing, and a serious program to develop the resources of the Western hemisphere, we could get along without the Middle East. Who, then would be hurt if the Russians cut off the oil? The Japanese and the Western Europeans. If oil is what's at stake, let them fight the Russians if they want to. For too long we have acted like their big brother. That attitude made sense in the 1950s when we were richer and stronger than anyone else. But it is still the fundamental assumption of our respectable foreign policy thinkers at a time when we can't afford it any longer. Our "allies" have let us bankrupt ourselves paying for their defense, while they smugly lecture us about the need to get our economic house in order.

In this respect, no country is more outrageous than Japan. Our money goes into providing them with a nuclear umbrella, while theirs goes into more modern plants to produce the cars, steel, and television sets that are destroying American industries. While their flaws may have been exaggerated by the typical film of World War II, it is safe to say that the Japanese have not always acted with benign regard to our national interests. So why should we behave differently? Let's continue to protect them from being nuked by the Russians, but only if they pay their fair share of the costs and give us the same trading privileges we've given them. . . .

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With so much money wasted in the government every day, why isn't more spent on IRS audits? They bring in $7 for every dollar the government spends on them.... A survey reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* compares the goals and attitudes of college freshmen in 1969 and 1979. The findings are many, but the least cheering are these:

- Being well-off financially was valued in 1979 by 28 percent more men and 77 percent more women than in 1969.
- Developing a philosophy of life was chosen by 36 percent fewer women and 35 percent fewer men.
- Keeping up with public affairs was chosen by 33 percent fewer women and 18 percent fewer men....

•

The current discussion about removing restraints on the CIA also reminds me of the 1950s, when the talk was about unleashing Chiang Kai Shek, and the image evoked was of an efficient military machine straining at its shackles, ready to leap across the Formosa Strait and devastate the Reds. The catch was that in prior engagements with the Communist armies, the Generalissimo's forces had a batting average of around .150. The situation at the CIA is not unsimilar, only its average may be a bit lower. Recall its wrong predictions—that the Shah was secure in 1978, that Vietnam would not collapse in the spring of 1975, that war would not break out in the Middle East in the fall of 1973—and the grotesque mixture of evil and clownishness that characterized its assassination attempts. And think for a moment—can you name even three major actions of the CIA that were both wise and effective?

There is always the argument that it's better to assassinate a Hitler than to fight a World War. That sounds persuasive, but my guess is that if we'd had the CIA in the thirties, it would have tried to assassinate not Hitler, but Marshall Tito, General DeGaulle, and Count von Stauffenberg. By 1944, of course, when von Stauffenberg carried his bomb-filled briefcase into a meeting with Hitler, the CIA's parent agency, the OSS, was in action. Of this we can have no doubt. Who else would have moved the briefcase *away* from the Fuhrer the precise distance necessary to let him escape unharmed?...

•

God bless *The New York Times*! In an editorial entitled "Finding Suckers for Savings Bonds," it has given respectable sanction to an ancient cause of this magazine:

"Uncle Sam has a new deal for savers—gullible savers, that is. The Treasury Department has raised the annual interest paid on Series EE U.S. Savings Bonds from 6½ to 7 percent—provided the bonds are held a full 11 years. That doesn't sound half bad, unless you know that any corner bank is offering 9.85 percent on amounts as small as $500....

"If the Treasury wants to build rather than erode confidence in government, it should offer competitive rates or get out of the business of peddling bonds to small savers. The long success of the savings bond con game suggests that a sucker is indeed born every minute. But that doesn't justify the government's continuing effort to exploit them...."

•

William O. Bittman has escaped again. Bittman, you will remember, is one of the handful of Watergate figures, mostly lawyers, who evaded incarceration. He had, of course, not suspected a thing when he was told to pick up $25,000 cash left in a phone booth by one of CREEP's bagmen. Nor, a federal court recently ruled, should we have suspected anything when he proceeded to plead Howard Hunt guilty and keep him quiet, just as the White House wanted—at least we have been kept from confirming our suspicions by Bittman's successful plea of the statute of limitations, that great recourse of the innocent, against a charge of legal malpractice.... Do remember to call William Miller if you are ever caught with the gun in your hand, a body on the floor, and your pockets overflowing with jewels and greenbacks. In addition to getting Bittman off,

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Miller also kept Richard Kleindienst out of jail when there was as good a perjury case against him as you'll ever see. And Miller was the lawyer who, in the pardon negotiations with the Ford White House, represented Richard M. Nixon. . . . If you thought the double-dipping scandal had been stopped, consider this fact: The government spends over $100 million a year paying double pensions to people who retire on *disability* from one federal job and then get another from which they later also retire. . . .

Speaking of Watergate—or speaking of $25,000 cash—remember Dwayne Andreas? It was his $25,000 contribution to CREEP—donated in cash, not in a phone booth but on a Florida golf course—that helped finance the break-in at the Democratic National Committee. But don't think the Democrats sit around nursing grudges. Andreas turned up last month on the guest list for the black-tie White House dinner in honor of West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt. . . .

•

Remember those Firestone 500 tires that were so dangerously defective they had to be recalled? Well, guess who got caught reselling the recalled tires in its San Francisco Bay area stores? Good old Montgomery Ward. Maybe Jimmy Stewart will make a commercial for Ward's explaining how it has acted in the spirit of good old Harvey Firestone by discovering a loophole in the law that permits the resale. According to Elias Castillo of the *San Jose Mercury News,* who uncovered the story, Ward's resold the Firestone 500s under its own brand name. "Yes," I can hear Stewart saying, "old Harvey would have liked that." . . .

In another triumph for the consumer, the U.S. Court of Appeals has suspended an FTC rule that allowed the advertising of prices and services by people who prescribe and sell eyeglasses. The reasoning of the court is that the

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FTC was taking over the states' regulatory functions. I'm curious as to how a freedom—in this case to advertise—can be called regulation. . . .

•

The New York Times recently ran a photograph of Manhattan office buildings at night. If it was night, you may be wondering, how could you see them? The reason is that they were ablaze with lights. The *Times* complained about the waste of energy. I was curious about the waste of money. The tenants or the landlords, after all, will have to pay those ever-higher electric bills. If they don't care about saving energy, they should at least care about saving their own cash. But then I realized that most Americans have stopped trying to control costs. We have become the Pass-Along Society, with an increasingly accepted solution to inflation that says, instead of trying to control costs just pass them along—in this case from landlord to tenant to the tenants' customers. . . . Efforts in behalf of worker safety can be ludicrous. Recently, a California contractor was fined because his employees were not required to wear life jackets while working on a bridge, even though he pointed out that the bridge crossed a dry river bed. Perhaps the inspector reasoned that life jackets would cushion the fall. The other side of the story comes from Virginia, where there now have been 14 worker deaths in the construction industry in the last two years. During that time safety inspectors have visited only two percent of the area's construction sites. . . .

•

If you find yourself vaguely troubled by those special courses on improving scholastic aptitude scores, you may have similar feelings about an organization called the Grantsmanship Center. It publishes a four-color magazine that promises to tell "how the country's most successful grant seekers got that way," and "how to write better proposals," and "how funding sources review proposals and make grants." . . . In case your problem isn't getting a grant but keeping one that the government is threatening to cut off, there is another source of help. The District of Columbia Bar is sponsoring a conference on "Federal Grant Litigation," candidly subtitled "Biting the Hand That Feeds You." It promises "a step-by-step guide to fighting grant termination or cutback" and offers to explain the developing field of "the grantee's right to a hearing before a federal agency." If the government is making a grant to you—giving you something not yours by legal right—why shouldn't it be able to stop without having to go through a costly legal hearing, further enriching the members of the D.C. Bar?

•

In the final returns from Maine, Carter led Kennedy by 7.8 percent. Yet the political reporters treated his victory, if not as a downright defeat, as a disappointing showing. Carter also defeated Kennedy by 11 percent in New Hampshire, and by almost 3 to 1 in Vermont. (You would have had a hard time even finding the last result in *The Washington Post,* which in its morning-after report of the Massachusetts and Vermont primaries, devoted 31 paragraphs to Kennedy's victory and three to Carter's.) Three months ago these same reporters were predicting that Kennedy would sweep New England. Why, then, did they not deem the Carter victories decisive? My guess is that it is because they view political campaigns the same way I watch football games. Unless the Redskins are involved, I root for the team that is behind—until it moves ahead, that is. Then I give my support to the other team, switching sides thereafter as often as the lead changes. The reason for my deplorable lack of constancy is that, above all else, I want the game to be interesting. And that is what I think reporters want from a political campaign. Just as the true football fan longs for the game to go into overtime, the true political reporter secretly wishes for a deadlock in the Electoral College. Their change of bias is, I'm sure, less calculated than mine, but the result is the same. When it seemed that Kennedy would blow Carter out of the park, they became sympathetic to the president; and when Carter won in Iowa, they were ready to discover that Kennedy was reborn.

—*Charles Peters*

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by Thomas N. Bethell

It's that time again. You've just filed your federal tax returns and you're mad as hell. Washington has left you broken and bleeding, just like last year, and when you look to the future all you can see is the certainty of getting mugged again in 1981. There's no escape. Television offers only the regularly scheduled spectacle of candidates slipping stealthily across state lines to whisper outrageous promises into the ears of anyone old enough to vote and young enough to believe in the tooth fairy. Meanwhile, tomorrow's paper will surely bring another of Jack Anderson's sweaty-palm dispatches from the front, describing how the government squandered a zillion dollars of your tax money training ghetto youths to become deep-sea divers, with a zero-percent job placement rate.

The thought occurs to you: Maybe Howard Jarvis and the Libertarians are right, by God. Maybe it's time to put out the fire, call the dogs, and head on back to the eighteenth century.

Maybe. But suppose, just for the sake of fantasy, that in the midst of your apoplexy the phone rings—and it's the White House calling. The president says he is aware of your anger—shares it, in fact—and needs your help. Says there's an important job vacancy coming open early next year, and he wants you to think about filling it. Says it could be the best job in Washington.

You hesitate, wondering what he's talking about. Secretary of State? Defense? National security adviser? CIA? Federal Reserve?

No, he says, it's much more important than any of those. He gives you a thumbnail description: First, the appointment is for a 15-year term—longer than anyone else's in government, except judges—and once you've been confirmed by the Senate you can be removed only by a joint congressional resolution approved by the president. So you'll be about as politically independent as anyone could hope to be. The salary is generous—$64,000 a year, and climbing—and at the end of your term you'll retire at full pay. You'll have an annual budget of more than $200 million to work with, and a staff of more than 5,000 at your command.

And now, the president says, here's the truly great thing about this job. For the next 15 years, you are to serve as America's supreme whistleblower, Uncle Sam's personal scourge, authorized by statute to roam fearlessly across the entire landscape of federal policies and programs searching for abuse, misuse, fraud, waste, corruption, malfeasance, misfeasance, misdirection, irrelevance, obsolescence—searching, in short, for wretched excesses and unjustified bureaucratic entrenchments of every kind. Find the programs that need to be changed. Find the programs that need to be killed outright. Report your findings

Thomas N. Bethell is an editor of The Washington Monthly. *Peter Engel and Steven Findlay provided research assistance for this article.*

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boldly to the Congress and the nation. Pull no punches. Don't water down your reports for fear of offending the powerful—they can't touch you. Don't worry about finding work when you leave government service—remember, this job will carry you straight through to retirement. It will be your last job, the most useful you will ever hold; you will be the government's management consultant, the ombudsman for an entire nation. Think it over, the president says, and call me in the morning.

Sounds terrific. But there are limits to fantasy, of course; sooner or later we all have to come back to the real world. Alas, the president hasn't been calling—and even if he did, he couldn't offer you an appointment like that, because everybody knows there's no such job in Washington.

That's where you're wrong. The president may not call to offer you this extraordinary assignment, but he could; in fact, he'll have to call *someone* about it before March 8, 1981, because on that day Elmer Boyd Staats will complete his 15-year term as Comptroller General of the United States. Elmer Staats, the 65-year-old chief of the General Accounting Office, is the man with the best job in Washington—or, more precisely, he is the man with what *could have been* the best job, if only he had been visionary enough to see it that way.

Scrutineers and Advocates

For nearly as long as there have been governments, there have been government auditors. Aristotle called them "scrutineers and public advocates"—terms that would be hard to improve upon. The notion of trying to insulate auditors from political influence isn't new, either; the British built it into their system more than a century ago. Here, the idea really caught on only with the rapid expansion of government during the first world war. Wilsonian reformers in the White House worried about who was minding the store, and their opposite numbers on Capitol Hill shared their concern. Wilson himself had written that in an era of governmental growth it was vitally important for Congress to "look diligently into every affair of government" and "talk much about what it sees."

Gradually this kind of thinking led to the establishment of an interlocking budget-control system, to be operated from opposite ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. The president would have a Bureau of the Budget, charged with the proper allocation of limited resources among competing programs, and Congress would have a General Accounting Office to follow the cash flow and see where it all wound up. GAO would be "semijudicial," according to Rep. James Good, a sponsor of the enabling legislation; it would have a "reflex influence" on the Budget Bureau (later to become the Office of Management and Budget). "The Bureau will know at all times that GAO is watching it," Good said, "and that for every appropriation there will have to be a legitimate use."

This sweeping corollary to the theory of checks and balances—embodying the novel idea that a permanent congressional agency would have the unrestricted right to second-guess everything the executive branch initiated—was carried forward intact into the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921. The act created the unique job of comptroller general—a government employee whom the president could hire but not fire, a concept not found in the Constitution—and gave him the explicit mandate to investigate, report on, and make recommendations about "all matters" having anything to do with the use of public funds.

A visionary comptroller general could hardly have asked for more, and it was said at the time that "the opportunities of the comptroller general to serve the United States. . . are greater than those of any other elected or appointed public officer, not excluding the president and his cabinet." But in their interpretations of their authority, all five of the comptrollers general appointed since 1921 have left GAO's scope and range diminished in ways not required by law.

Rooting in the Leaves

The first GAO chief, J. Raymond McCarl, who served from the early days of Harding's administration until nearly the end of Franklin D. Roosevelt's first term in 1936, was a fanatic about petty government improprieties. McCarl mobilized a small army of 1,700 crotchety accountants and marched them out to ferret among the

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government's growing piles of voucher slips and check stubs. Looking for the tiniest traces of wrongdoing, they tended to overlook the big scandals—like Teapot Dome—and had almost no effect on the corruption that would be remembered as Harding's legacy.

With the passing of time, McCarl acquired a reputation as a hopelessly ossified nitpicker, a condition exacerbated by his personal loathing for FDR's expansionist-government policies. He made a public fuss about such things as the unauthorized purchase of a mule by the Tennessee Valley Authority (for use in agricultural demonstration projects) and the unauthorized purchase of a camera by the Interior Department (queried by McCarl about the intended use of the camera, Secretary Harold Ickes fired off a famous one-line answer: "To take pictures, you damned fool!").

By the end of his term, McCarl had few allies at either end of Pennsylvania Avenue. In the rapidly growing forests of federal programs, he wasn't even looking at the trees; he was snuffling noisily among piles of dead leaves, pursuing a *modus operandi* that haunts GAO to this day. Roosevelt tried to maneuver a bill through Congress giving the White House more control over GAO. Thwarted, he took care to see that McCarl's successor would be more congenial; he appointed an exceptionally low-profile senator named Fred H. Brown, whose main claim to fame was that he had once played baseball for the Boston Braves. Hardly a man is now alive at GAO who can remember anything about Fred H. Brown. After a mere 14 months on the job, he suddenly stepped down, claiming ill health, and faded instantly into the footnotes.

The third comptroller general, Lindsay Warren, was a veteran congressman from North Carolina, neither a champion of the New Deal nor an opponent, and above all loyal to his colleagues on Capitol Hill. A born compromiser, Warren was also an instinctive bureaucrat; he inherited a staff of 4,400, but within a few years he had more than three times that many people rooting through the leaves.

GAO's dramatic growth could be explained to some extent, of course, by the vastly expanded role of the government during World War II. Warren's minions carried out the first investigations of profiteering defense contractors—scandals that began to establish the GAO's public image as "the watchdog of Congress"—but GAO auditors remained, for the most part, bogged down in trivia. Each year, for example, they would sift through about five million government transportation vouchers (sometimes stopping to question the cost claimed for a single cup of coffee) and nearly 500 million canceled checks.

Congress relieved GAO of much of this burden in 1950, with a law transferring responsibility for routine audits to the individual agencies, but GAO did not immediately lift its eyes and begin looking among the trees for signs of disease, much less try to get an overview of the whole forest. Change came, hesitantly, with the arrival of the fourth comptroller general, Joseph Campbell, appointed by Eisenhower in 1955.

Cheese Squeeze, Zinc Stink

Campbell was a New York City accountant who had been treasurer of Columbia University when Eisenhower was the university's president. He wasn't exactly an outsider at GAO—he was already in Washington, at the Atomic Energy Commission, when Eisenhower tapped him for the job—but he wasn't clubby with Congress or chummy with friends of the administration. GAO veterans remember him today as a man who "loved to chase the crooks down the halls"—an image that seems wildly romanticized except by comparison to his predecessors. Campbell ran a tight ship (shrinking the GAO workforce back to about 4,000); he believed in naming names and using appropriate adjectives when reporting tales of byzantine malefaction. Suddenly GAO began interrupting the comfortable slumber of the Eisenhower years with periodic revelations.

There was the "cheese squeeze," for example, in which GAO sleuths caught the Agriculture Department participating in a brazen scam—buying 42,000 tons of cheese from food producers and selling it back to them at a lower price. A series of congressional hearings followed, spreading cheese all over the front pages for weeks and endearing GAO to the Washington press corps. A few months later,

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Eisenhower appointed a man who surprised everybody by really rocking the boat. Lyndon Johnson wasn't about to make the same mistake. He appointed Elmer Staats.

GAO was in the news again with the "zinc stink." This time a high-ranking Defense Department official was found to have ordered the purchase of zinc by the trainload, ostensibly for the nation's strategic stockpiles program. In the absence of any demonstrable need for vast stockpiles of zinc, GAO suggested the explanation for the purchases might lie in the fact that the government official in question was on leave from his regular job as president of the American Zinc Company.

This was great stuff for reporters—but to Campbell's surprise, many congressmen were not amused. Prompted by irate corporate lobbyists, they held hearings in which Campbell was flailed for minor inaccuracies in GAO's report and for leaking it to the press before delivering it to Congress. The episode gave Campbell a small taste of a much more bitter experience to come—a lesson that GAO has never forgotten.

Nibbling at the Bedrock

In his 1961 farewell address, Eisenhower startled Americans with his bleak warning about "the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power" inherent in "the acquisition of unwarranted influence... by the military-industrial complex." Campbell was acutely aware of the problem; GAO was auditing hundreds of defense contracts and turning up one gross abuse after another. GAO's reports named the companies, documented the overcharges and the cozy relationships between the defense industry and the Pentagon, and insisted that contract windfalls should be returned to the public treasury.

The companies fumed. Hewlett-Packard, with the support of the rest of the industry, took Campbell to court, challenging GAO's right to inspect company records. The courts upheld the comptroller general, but his victory was long in the litigating. Meanwhile, a united front of opposition was forming against him. Within the government, the Pentagon and the Atomic Energy Commission were particularly eager to take him on. General Motors, Boeing, Lockheed, Westinghouse, and General Electric—along with many other companies stinging from GAO criticism—began forming a corporate vigilante group, ready to sandbag Campbell as soon as the opportunity arose. They lined up a powerful champion in Congress—Rep. Chet Holifield, chairman of the House Government Operations Committee's subcommittee on military affairs. Although Holifield had no defense contractors in his own California district, his state was crawling with them.

In mid-1965, Holifield launched a series of hearings inquiring into the adequacy of GAO investigations. The hearings ran on for two months; GAO was on the defensive from the beginning and stayed there. Holifield trotted out a parade of heavy-duty witnesses, led by Assistant Defense Secretary Paul Ignatius, who said he just couldn't understand why GAO was putting out so many reports on Pentagon activities—544 reports in 1964 compared to 206 just two years previously. Air Force Assistant Secretary Robert Charles rumbled warnings about destroying "the bedrock of our commercial system"—the sanctity of contracts. "You nibble away at this," he

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GAO pumps out 1,100 reports a year. The sheer mass of these reports reinforces the impression that GAO keeps every aspect of government under close scrutiny.

said, "and you nibble away at something far bigger than an occasional refund out of the millions of transactions in which we are involved." Holifield, abandoning any pretense of neutrality, chimed in: "The Chair is in complete concurrence."

Although the hearing transcripts fill more than 1,000 pages of fine print, there's not much in them challenging the essential validity of GAO's investigative work. Instead, witnesses zeroed in on what they called GAO's "inflammatory, colored, and sensational" language. They thought words like "overcharge," "unnecessary costs," and "failure to protect the government's interest" were unduly loaded. In retrospect, it seems unbelievable that the witnesses weren't laughed out of the hearing room. Far from it—they won the day. In the middle of the hearings, Campbell quit, claiming failed health, and soon thereafter the GAO ran up a white flag of unconditional surrender, agreeing to ease off. Reports henceforth would generalize more, to avoid embarrassing individual companies; they would emphasize "constructive and corrective changes for the future, rather than focusing on errors of the past"; even the titles would be phrased in "less controversial" language.

The humiliation of GAO would have done credit to the Spanish Inquisition. According to many GAO sources, the scars of the Holifield hearings have never fully healed. Senior GAO bureaucrats tend to talk about the hearings as though they had ended just last week, and it's clear that nobody wants to get caught in that kind of brouhaha again. GAO has always had its share of institutional caution—accountants rarely take up hang-gliding—but Holifield seems to have left an enduring legacy of apprehension that partially accounts for GAO's excessively self-protective posture today.

Rabbits and Eggs

If Elmer Staats ever had any rough edges, they've long since been buffed to a soft, smooth sheen. The man chosen by Lyndon Johnson in 1966 to succeed Joseph Campbell at GAO is a veteran Washington survivor, a man who looks both ways before deciding not to cross the street. He was fresh out of graduate school (economics and political science) when he settled in Washington, worked briefly at the Brookings Institution and then, in 1939, moved to the Bureau of the Budget—where he stayed and stayed, rising to become deputy director, a job in which he managed to serve Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson without ever offending anybody. He married a congressman's daughter, went to church regularly, played a social game of golf, and liked to lunch with friends at the Cosmos Club. When Johnson sent his name over to the Senate, there was no serious opposition; everyone agreed he was just the man to restore peace at GAO. "He's a builder," Johnson said with one of those treacly smiles, "not a doubter." The finely tuned instinct for compromise that Staats had nurtured over the years at the Budget Bureau traveled easily to the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue. In his first few years at GAO, he seemed to be truly a magician—a man who could rock a boat without making waves.

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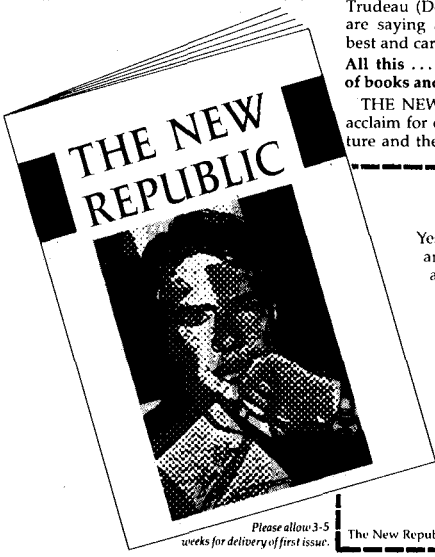

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The essence of magic, of course, is to persuade the audience it's seeing something that isn't really happening—rabbits in hats, eggs popping out of sleeves. Staats's rabbits are the reports that come hopping out of GAO with such awesome frequency—about 1,100 a year, on the average. The sheer mass of these reports, all bound in their pale blue covers, reinforces the impression that GAO under Elmer Staats is really and truly keeping every aspect of government under ceaseless scrutiny.

Staats has buttressed this impression with some reorganizational touches. Several years ago he restructured the agency into 12 divisions responsible for 29 different categories of investigation in every field from energy to consumer protection. This gave GAO a much more contemporary look, in line with Congress's expressed desire to see the agency ranging broadly across programs rather than sifting through invoices. But Staats has always been quick to adapt to shifting trends. When Robert McNamara's economists persuaded Washington that the key to efficient government was their Planning-Programming-Budgeting System (PPBS), Staats agreed. When Nixon dropped PPBS and substituted Management by Objectives, Staats applauded. When Carter rejected Management by Objectives in favor of Zero-Base Budgeting, Staats concurred.

Like any good magician, he planned ahead in case anyone in the audience noticed these sleights of hand. In his reorganization of GAO, Staats took pains to establish the agency's first "congressional liaison" office and its first "public information" office. These terms are so common in Washington and so innocuous that nobody seems to have spotted the contradictions. As a wholly-owned subsidiary of Congress, GAO shouldn't need congressional "liaison" any more than, say, Barnum & Bailey need "liaison" with Ringling Brothers. And since its entire product (except for classified reports) is public, it shouldn't need much of a "public information" office either. But the terms are misnomers, of course. In the old days, Staats's predecessors railed against other government agencies for spending too much time and money propagandizing and massaging congressmen and reporters. Under Staats, the GAO no longer criticizes other people for that kind of thing. Magicians aren't supposed to reveal each other's secrets.

Our Friend GAO

Covering GAO critically is a problem for reporters, because the existence of the agency makes life so much easier than it would be otherwise. On a slow news day, reporters and editors paw through piles of the pale blue reports, confident of finding something with shock value among all the statistics and the stultifying sentences written in purest governmentese. You can pick up any report at random, and once you've fought your way past the title you're bound to strike gold. Here's one: "Endangered Species—A Controversial Issue Needing Resolution." Somewhere in this 105-page epic you'll find documentary evidence that the Interior Department has been heartlessly neglecting its responsibility to the Pine Barrens Tree Frog. Or, if you choose to approach it from a different bias, you'll find evidence that foot-dragging bureaucrats have delayed dozens of vitally needed public-works projects for fear of disturbing the Santa Cruz Long-Toed Salamander. Whatever your slant, you can be sure of a story before the day is out. GAO eagerly watches to see which of its reports get "nationwide media coverage" and, naturally, keeps stats: 200 reports make the grade every year now, compared to a mere 31 back in 1972.

This doesn't prove that GAO reports are better than they were eight years ago—only that more and more reporters are leaning on GAO to provide copy. *The Washington Post* carries an average of three GAO-generated stories a week—not always attributed. Without GAO, Jack Anderson's column would appear some days as a blank space, and *60 Minutes* would sputter into silence after half an hour. The seductive attraction of GAO reports has to do with a trap into which even the best reporters sometimes fall: the need to quantify everything. How can you report that a program is a failure without *numbers* to back up your charges?

The obsession with data—as a substitute for direct observation—skews our entire politics, of course, leading to news reports of candidates leaping and falling in popularity based on 30-second "surveys" of a

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We're obsessed with data these days—with the need to quantify everything. In the numbers game, GAO is the readiest of resources, a reporter's best friend.

few hundred people, and to monthly updates on inflation written by people who don't know the first thing about how productivity is "measured" or how the Consumer Price Index is "determined." In the numbers game, GAO is the readiest of resources, and the temptation to rely on it can be overwhelming.

This gives Staats and GAO great credibility with the press, but it also tends to mask GAO's continuing difficulty with determining the difference between leaves and trees. Between 1974 and 1978, for example, GAO published more than 200 reports on the General Services Administration, consistently finding "unsound" accounting practices but never catching on to the bigger picture of fraud and corruption later exposed by *Washington Post* reporter Ronald Kessler. Kessler used GAO materials in his investigation, but he had the great advantage of not being hamstrung by GAO tradition. Sniffing an unmistakable odor, he followed it to its source. Stopping along the way to collect numbers was important to him—but not *all*-important.

Staats argues it's not all-important to GAO, either. With his support, Congress in 1970 passed a law giving GAO specific authority to "review and analyze the *results* of government programs" (emphasis added), and he claims that over the past decade GAO has shifted steadily away from its green-eyeshade mentality and more toward an overview approach. Naturally, he has numbers to back this up. But a typical GAO report—"Federal Agencies Can and Should Do More to Combat Fraud in Government Programs"—which severely criticized the internal auditing procedures of six agencies, didn't suggest that they might identify failed programs and rip-offs by sending out bright people to see with their own eyes. Instead, GAO recommended hiring more auditors. The theory here is that the more numbers there are to look at, the more people there should be to look at them. This would have exactly the opposite of the desired effect: Whenever the government hires more people to watch over the people who are already hired, the opportunity for fraud increases in direct proportion to the increased confusion and paperwork generated by increased employment. The idea that the government could make itself more efficient and fraud-proof by trimming rather than expanding its own managerial ranks hasn't penetrated GAO.

Government by Xerox

One reason may be that GAO itself has become a listless and largely purposeless bureaucracy under Staats. It's instructive to wander through GAO headquarters at 441 G Street in downtown Washington on a weekday afternoon, listening to rank-and-file GAO staff people. Talk about shattered illusions! You won't find yourself in a nest of dedicated, eagle-eyed sleuths happily banging out the reports that newspapermen will later make into headlines. Far from it—what you'll find is a place indistinguishable from most other government offices. The prevailing mood matches the paint—pale gray, pale green, pale beige, depending on where you are. On the seventh floor there's an office set aside as a museum to the early days; through the door you can see two roll-top

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desks, some green eyeshades, a stand-up telephone, a couple of battered Underwoods. In that locked and empty office there's more spirit than you'll find anywhere else in the building.

GAO has its share of dedicated people—probably more than its share—but they work under the terrible handicap of never really knowing where they're going. They are surrounded, every day, by contradictions. They work for an investigative bureaucracy—a contradiction in terms. Their own internal operating manual says, on the one hand, that GAO's evaluations are to cover the entire spectrum of assessing "the efficiency, economy, legality, and effectiveness" of government programs—but elsewhere it warns: "Our objective is not to become the 'think tank' for the Congress on the best solutions to pressing national problems. Nor is it our job to assess overall national program priorities or budget funding requirements."

You may be forgiven for asking the obvious: If it's not GAO's job to figure out what's wrong and suggest how to make it right, whose job *is* it? Nobody seems to be sure. Congress, troubled by the same question, has spent much of the past ten years making matters worse by legislating GAO clones. In the 1970 Legislative Reorganization Act, for example, Congress converted the Legislative Reference Service to the Congressional Research Service, with responsibility for advising Congress on the effectiveness of legislation—a responsibility that overlaps GAO's own area of expertise. In 1972 Congress created the Office of Technology Assessment, which spends much of its time second-guessing energy and environmental policies—just as GAO does. In 1974 Congress created the Congressional Budget Office, which keeps tabs on the budget and conducts economic analyses of federal programs—just as GAO does.

It isn't clear that Congress is getting any better advice from four agencies today than it was getting from one in 1970, but it *is* clear, of course, that more people are doing the advising—6,290 "congressional support agency personnel" now, compared to 4,814 in 1970. That's only *direct* employment, naturally; it doesn't include the thousands of consultants who work for GAO, CRS, OTA, and CBO. And it excludes the 3,500 staff people working directly for congressional committees.

If these numbers convey an image of bodies falling over each other in the rush to Xerox each other's reports, that's not too wide of the mark. For its part, Congress seems to have largely despaired of ever getting good advice from anyone. Nearly 80 per cent of the congressmen surveyed by a news service a few months ago said they seldom if ever make any use of GAO reports. When the House Select Committee on Congressional Operations studied GAO's troubles in 1978, it concluded that "bureaucratic rigidities" and internal rivalries between the old green-eyeshade types and the new policy-analyst types were hobbling the organization. Perhaps influenced by having read too many GAO reports, the committee couched its conclusions in language that sounded like a parody of Elmer Staats: "The effective integration of accounting skills. . . with the evaluative skills of the policy sciences required by GAO's post-1970 responsibilities has not yet succeeded in reaching a desirable objective."

Staats Rites

Except for a few congressmen who enjoy an especially comfortable working rapport with Staats, the evidence is that most of the people on Capitol Hill have seen no improvement since that report was written. GAO is still regularly criticized for refusing to undertake projects it doesn't want to handle, for taking unconscionable amounts of time pulling together the projects it does accept, and for pulling its punches when it finally gets a report completed. GAO operating procedures guarantee that the problems will persist. About two thirds of its projects now are self-initiated, a statistic that suggests not so much any spirit of feisty independence as the absence of congressional interest. GAO may take anywhere from 12 to 24 months cranking out a routine report; as much as three fifths of that time can be consumed by sending the report through layers of editing, including the time spent permitting agencies to rebut GAO charges before the report is issued. GAO investigators complain that their raw material bears little resemblance to what finally emerges from Elmer Staats's great beige word-

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GAO investigators have ideas—but by the time their reports go through the Cuisinart, their observations have been reduced to a flavorless, dehumanized mass of pulp.

processing machine. (That's one reason GAO people frequently leak drafts of their reports to the press.)

Staats is always ready for criticisms like these. He churns out letters, press releases, and congressional testimony in which he patiently explains that his agency must always guard against any erosion of credibility—and, to do that, it must never sacrifice accuracy to speed, must continue to be selective about accepting and rejecting project requests, and must give everybody's brother the opportunity to comment on its investigations-in-progress.

Arguments like these sound like the essence of sweet reason and enlightened management, of course, and Staats uses them skillfully to reinforce his image as an eminently responsible boat-rocker. In this, he has the unwitting assistance of his critics. Every time *Business Week* huffs about GAO becoming "a sort of super-government, the supreme second-guesser and final arbiter of everything" (a charge occasioned by GAO criticism of the Army's new XM1 battle tank), congressional liberals will pause momentarily to reflect that *GAO must be doing something right, by God.* On the other hand, every time a bureaucrat like Barbara Blum of the Environmental Protection Agency grumbles about GAO becoming "a fourth branch of government" (a charge based on her agency being subjected to more than 50 GAO investigations simultaneously), congressional conservatives will smile inwardly at the idea that *GAO must be doing something right, by God.* For a man like Elmer Staats, the key to political survival is to make sure his opponents left and right cancel each other out, and Staats does that as well as anybody in Washington.

It's his success at this game that obscures his overwhelming failure to do more than make GAO the Great Quantifier of governmental problems. Some years ago, the late Richard Rovere of *The New Yorker* concluded that the fatal flaw of almost every reform effort initiated by the executive branch of government lay in the tendency "to quantify wherever possible and, when recommendations are in order, to urge only procedural and structural reforms." Rovere enthusiastically supported the idea of a much more freewheeling approach, using investigators—some of them definitely not government careerists, and others recruited from the ranks of skeptical outsiders who wouldn't trust a government even if they were in charge of it—who would go out, conduct site inspections, satisfy themselves that their observations were accurate and representative, and write reports reflecting exactly what they saw and concluded. If they concluded that a project or program was utterly useless, the report would say so.

The germ of this approach exists at GAO, but it has never been permitted to grow beyond the first stage. GAO investigators do conduct site inspections, and like other human beings they react to what they see. But by the time their reports go through Elmer Staats's bureaucratic Cuisinart, their observations have been reduced to a flavorless, dehumanized pulp, heavily garnished with data. The result may look impressive, but GAO data are to direct observation what pureed zucchini is to Three-Alarm chili. If people seldom remember what GAO served yesterday, it's largely for that reason.

Even the rare GAO report with a life expectancy measurable in weeks rather

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than days or hours contains the same basic shortcoming. GAO made headlines, for example, with its report on the XM1 tank, noting particularly the silliness of equipping a tank with a turbine engine that runs reliably only in dust-free conditions. GAO's investigators, unlike the Army's tank-thinkers, were perceptive enough to understand that battlefields seldom meet EPA ambient-air standards. GAO's report, in final form, suggested that the Army should think about using a diesel engine instead. But the report read like any other GAO report, and the Army's allies on Capitol Hill eventually smothered it with the usual reassurances about making a few changes and the usual criticism of GAO for using old data. GAO might *really* have made waves if its investigators had been allowed to report their true feelings about the tank.

Off the record, one government investigator describes the XM1 as "the biggest fraud since the C-5A cargo plane." The great appeal of the tank, he says, is that "almost anybody can operate it—even a congressman—and when you're going 40 m.p.h. and mock-firing that big 105-mm. cannon with a push-button computerized rangefinder, you're like a kid with a toy. It's easy to forget that the thing is too heavy for any cargo plane (except the unreliable C-5A), too inefficient to go any distance—it gets less than half-a-mile to the gallon, so you can imagine the logistics of supplying fuel to these things when they're advancing. And when all that sophisticated hardware breaks down in the middle of nowhere, you're not going to get it going again with your average Army mechanic and an open-end wrench. We're going to spend $12 billion to buy 7,000 of these things over the next ten years and when we're finished the Russians will still have four or five times as many tanks. And they can actually *use* theirs."

Language like that, reflecting the honest outrage of a sensible man, never sees the light of day in GAO reports. Staats's defenders recoil at the idea, for the same reason they balk at the idea of having investigators sign their reports. That would make one person (or a team) responsible for the accuracy of a report—and if the report turned out to be a dud, the investigator would be turned out too. That system seems to work all right for responsible practitioners of investigative journalism. Since GAO operates in a closely related field, why not try it? "The big difference," says a GAO official, "is that editors don't have to spend half their time in front of congressional committees explaining themselves. The comptroller general can't tell a committee to go to hell."

Not in so many words, perhaps. But he could certainly take full advantage of the natural affinity between the press and GAO. An all-out effort by Congress to cut GAO's budget would almost certainly fail if GAO went public with its side of the story, explaining that it was being emasculated for the crime of being honest. Shielded by his 15-year term, and with a little help from his friends, a fearless comptroller general could go a long way toward making the job what it was once intended to be—the most useful in government, "not excluding the president and his cabinet."

Exit Elmer

The problem, of course, is that it's hard to imagine any president (at least among the current crop of possibilities) unleashing that kind of person on the government. It would require courage. Presidents by nature are far more attracted to men like Elmer Staats—*reasonable* men. Staats's great gift is to make everything he does—or doesn't do—sound supremely reasonable.

But when the magician leaves the stage, the rabbits and the card tricks go with him. Less than a year from now, when Elmer Staats steps down, it may be suddenly and painfully obvious that GAO is in trouble. Congress and the White House will share the responsibility of deciding what, if anything, to do about that. Indirectly, their responsibility will be shared by the Washington press corps. By not asking more of GAO—by continuing instead to use the convenient shorthand phrase, "Congress's watchdog agency," in every story—reporters are helping to perpetuate an amiable myth. A hound that stays up all night sniffing at the wind and barking at every stray cat in the neighborhood may technically qualify for the term "watchdog," but it may also be fast asleep when burglars come for the silverware in broad daylight. ■

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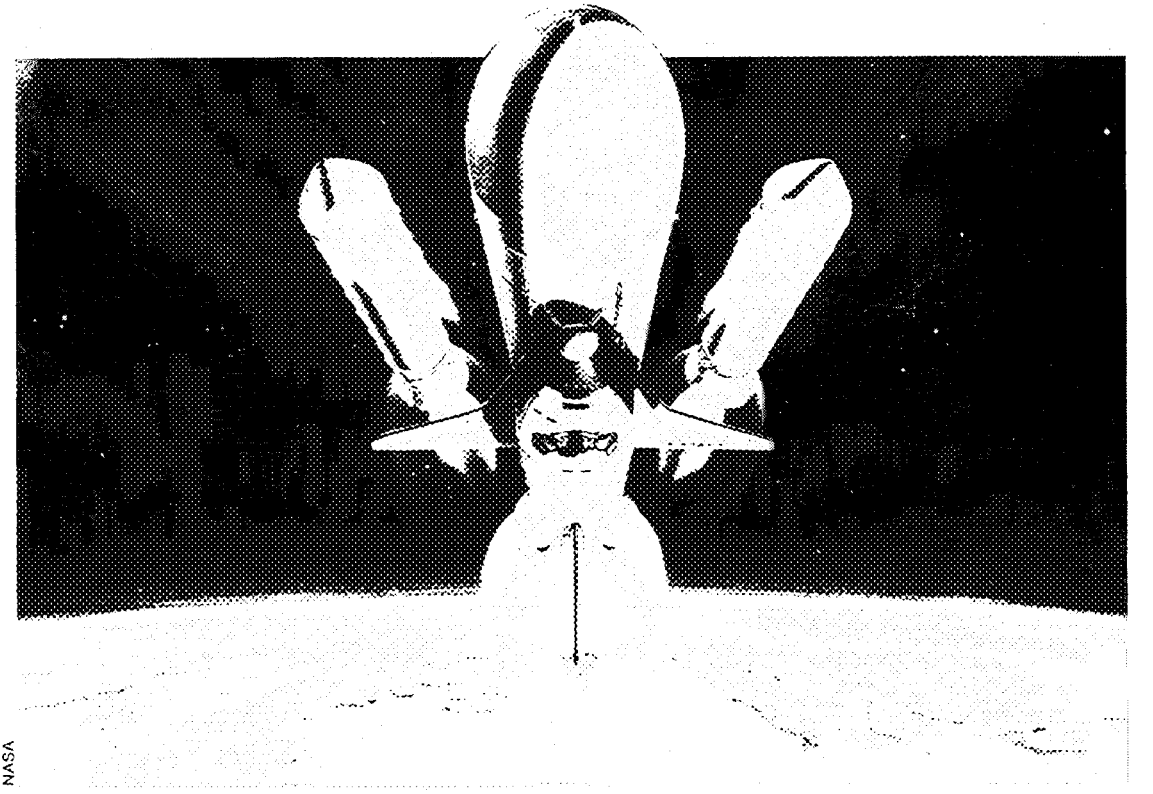

NASA

Routine Commute to Space Begins: *Main part of a space shuttle, the "orbiter," is at bottom.* Columbia, *the first of four orbiters, is supposed to blast off into space, release a cargo, then fly back to earth like an airplane. In this NASA drawing, its two booster rockets fall away after burning their fuel. Still strapped to* Columbia *is its fuel tank, which holds liquid gases to supply the shuttle's own engines. The tank falls off as soon as its fuel is spent.*

would never fly again? How would we win battles with this plane—make the enemy die laughing? Couldn't anybody see the aviator's new clothes were not clothes at all?

The Spruce Goose remains today in the hangar where it came to rest 33 years ago. The record for most expensive flying machine has long since been surpassed. There's something heavier, too. Down at Cape Kennedy the National Aeronautics and Space Administration is tinkering with the champion, the $1 billion, 2,300-ton space shuttle *Columbia*. *Columbia* is the first of at least four space shuttles. It will blast into space like a rocket, and sail back like an airplane. It isn't a "capsule," as they called the Mercury orbiters, or a "module," as they called the Apollo moon machine. It's a *spaceship*, designed to be used over and over again, instead of thrown away like a rocket. Much cheaper than rockets, much more versatile, it is the key to the next phase of space exploration. The space shuttle is to the Apollo module what the DC-3 was to Wright's flyer. With a fleet of these. . . .

But something doesn't look right about the astronaut's new clothes, either. The *Columbia* has yet to fly. It's several years behind schedule, with no imminent prospect, despite official assurances, that it will fly at all. But more important, if it *does* fly, it won't do anything those old throw-away rockets couldn't do. You've probably heard, for instance, that the space shuttle will retrieve damaged satellites and return them to earth for repair. Not so. It can't. Simply and flatly, *can't*. And, according to *The Washington Monthly*'s sources, flying the shuttle will cost more, not less, than flying those old disposable rockets.

If you haven't heard this, don't be surprised. After all, reporters clustered around Howard Hughes for years, begging to know when the Spruce Goose would fly and scribbling down the predicted dates. Nobody spent much time asking what it would *do* once it got up there. Getting it up there was the drama. What it would do

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was. . . well, there must be a reason or they wouldn't build it, would they?

Waning Moon

Even as the Apollo 11 moonship was being primed for what President Nixon called "the most important event since Creation"—the August 1969 moon landing—plans for a space shuttle were being drafted. By spring of 1969, Apollo's impending success seemed assured. The technological precision of Apollo was nothing short of remarkable; its builders and astronauts accomplished more than even the most optimistic among them predicted. But even NASA officials had to admit that being on the moon didn't amount to much. Getting there was all the fun. Some space venture had to be found to succeed Apollo.

A special White House "task group" was formed to select the next program. Roy Day, now a top official for the shuttle program, was pulled off Apollo to help NASA order its options. "It was assumed from the start that we needed some sort of manned mission," Day explains. "The progress of high technology and national prestige demanded it." After summarily dismissing less-expensive but less-glamorous mechanized space exploration (see "Battlestar Bureauctica" on page 42), NASA devised these possibilities: a manned landing on Mars; a manned fly-by (approach without landing) of Mars or Venus; a permanent moonbase; a permanent orbiting space station, with a shuttle vehicle to supply it; or, at last resort, the shuttle only.

Planetary missions were rejected as technically feasible but absurdly expensive. (A single Mars flight, requiring a nuclear-propelled spaceship traveling for years, was pegged at $100 billion. Apollo cost $20 billion.) The moonbase was nixed as useless. The space station sparked a lot of interest, but it too was overwhelmingly expensive. Its components would be so heavy, NASA's entire budget would be required to pay for the launch rockets—to say nothing, as space proponents are wont to do, of building or servicing it. The task group members reasoned that a reusable space shuttle would be the logical first step to prepare for a space station. Only the economy of a reusable shuttle could make the space station affordable.

The shuttle was to be nothing more than that—a space truck to lug things back and forth to orbit. The craft itself would have no scientific function. It was assumed by task group members that, once the shuttle was approved, somebody could devise some missions for it. "First you have to get the horse," said Dr. Jerry Gray, former NASA scientist and now public policy director of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, "then you decide where to ride him."

A Horse by Committee

NASA longed to abandon the familiar one-shot rocket—whose stages, once fired, went tumbling into the sea or burned up, taking their titanium castings and navigational computers with them. The Saturn V moon rocket, for example, weighed 3,050 tons at blast-off, and you got exactly seven tons back—that dinky little "command module" the men rode in. "We wanted to have only miniscule involvement with the rocket concept in the future," Day says.

At first NASA asked for an all-reusable shuttle. Grumman and McDonnell-Douglas came up with a plan that called for two huge winged ships, each with its own pilots and engines, mated piggyback. They would blast off together, with the larger ship—the booster—spitting fire for the first 10 to 20 miles of altitude. Then, fuel spent, it would circle back to land like an airplane. The smaller ship would continue into orbit, drop its cargo, reenter the atmosphere, and also land like a plane. NASA believed this system would be economical to operate, but would cost $10 billion to build. The Office of Management and Budget balked. Ten billion, it gasped—out of the question!

What could you do, OMB asked, for $5 billion? Design of the horse was referred to committee, where a compromise was found. A partially reusable shuttle was conceived.

In this plan, the shuttle's main part would be the "orbiter." That's the section that gets a name, like *Columbia*. It would be a winged rocket-powered flying machine about the size and weight of a DC-9 airliner. This orbiter would carry 65,000 pounds of cargo into a low orbit, stashing the goods in a 60-by-15-foot bay. It would

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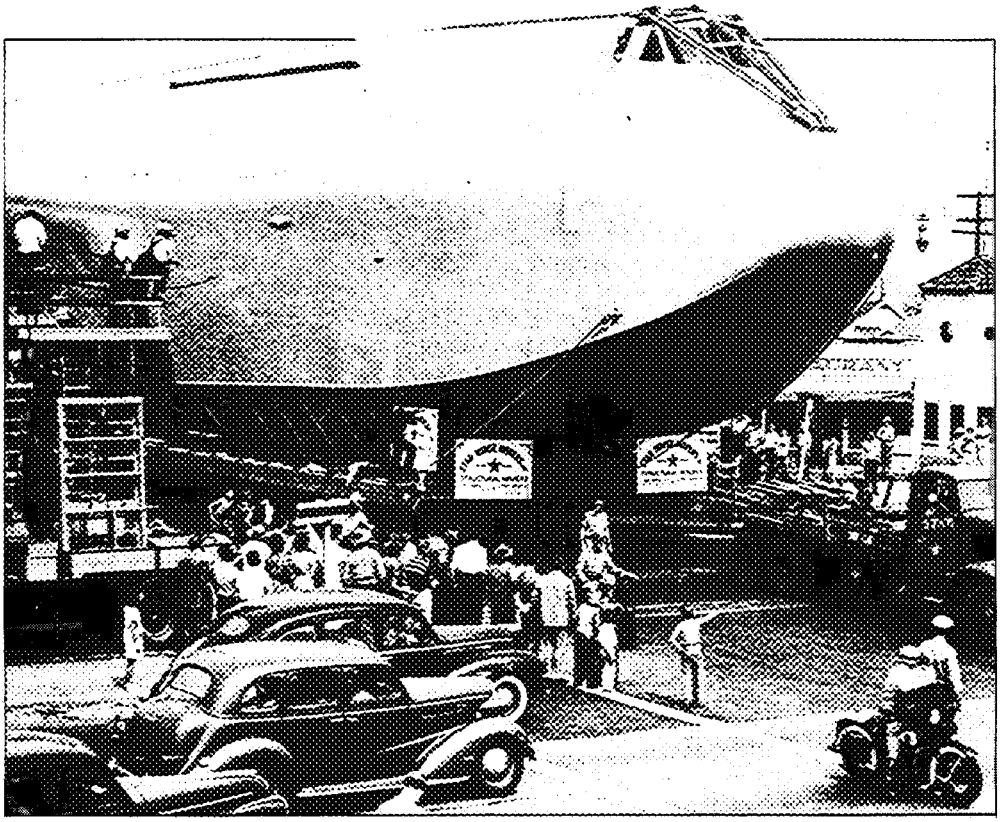
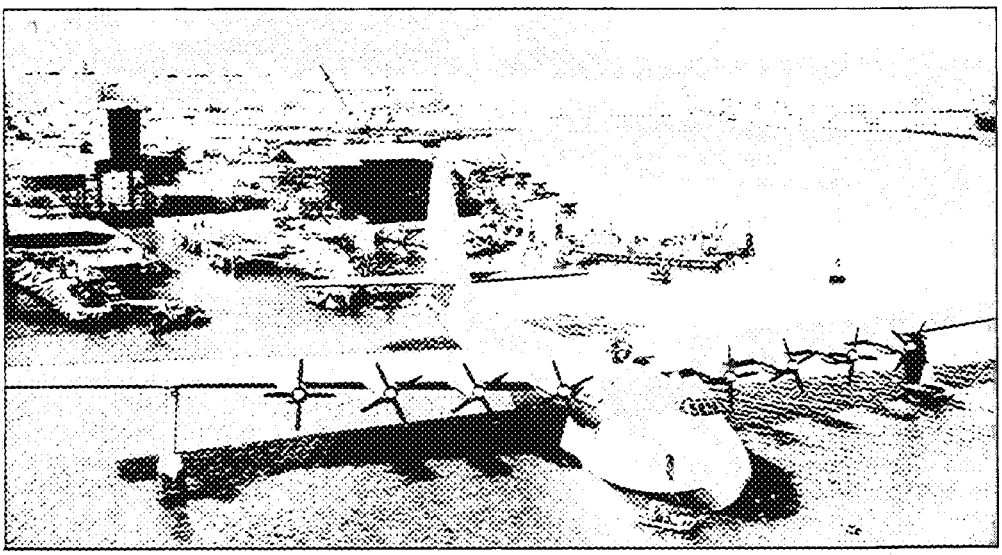
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION



The Space Shuttle of Long Beach: *Howard Hughes's* Spruce Goose. *Above, the fuselage is towed through Long Beach. The* Goose *was designed to carry 700 soldiers—or one Sherman tank. Below, it bobs by the dock, awaiting its "taxi tests" in November 1947. Hughes planned to taxi it across the harbor three times. Noting that the* Goose*'s speed had hit 90 m.p.h. (its take-off velocity) at the end of the second taxi, Hughes resolved to fly it on the third run—without notifying his crew. The* Goose *struggled aloft for 45 seconds—an agonizing hoist that left the engines gasping against their mounts and the hull permanently damaged. There was immediate nationwide acclaim for this "feat of aviation." The* Goose *never flew again. It was towed to a hangar, where it remains to this day. A Hughes Aircraft engineer was its constant guardian from 1947 until 1976, with orders from the boss to keep the hulk "ready to fly on 90 days' notice."*



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be flown by a crew of two to seven astronauts. Not *ridden* by strapped-down guinea pigs like those capsules and modules, but *flown* by *pilots*. Flown during landing, at least; the rest of the time they would pretty much watch the instruments. But there would be *people* in control—a concept popular with people, who seem to be less in control of things with every passing day.

The shuttle ship would be mounted piggyback on a cavernous 150-foot long fuel tank carrying the frigid liquid gases to power the shuttle's main engines. Strapped to it would be two booster rockets, powered by reliable solid fuel. Their motors would be the fiercest ever imagined—generating 2.5 million pounds of thrust each, as opposed to 470,000 pounds for each of the shuttle's three main engines. Those insatiable trolls would burn through their fuel in scarcely a moment.

Bolts and hoses fastened, the shuttle spaceship, its fuel tank, and the boosters would blast off together from Cape Kennedy, a tremendous troika of power. At an altitude of 20 miles, the spent boosters would fall away, floating down on parachutes. They would be fished out of the sea and used again. The shuttle's own engines would keep firing until, nine minutes after launch, their fuel was exhausted. Then the empty fuel tank would tumble away, to burn up in the atmosphere. (Since it's only a tank, NASA reasoned, it's cheaper to let it fry than bolt on all the navigational and heat-shielding hardware needed to get it back.)

The shuttle would go about its business in orbit. Lacking main-engine fuel, it would employ two small reaction rockets for maneuverability and to slow it down for reentry. Once back in the air, it would glide toward a landing field, setting down like an airplane but "deadstick"—without any power to compensate for miscalculations. After landing it would be refitted, mated to a new tank, strapped to two refilled boosters, and blasted off again.

Estimating a cost of $5 billion to $6 billion, NASA got its launch-commit for this design in 1972. The agency explained that having a crew of pilots aboard would add "flexibility" and "new dimensions" to space flight, but otherwise NASA wasn't terribly specific about what the astronauts would *do*. It was assumed that with the horse under construction some carriage-maker would build something for it to pull—a space mission only a shuttle could handle. Meanwhile, petting the animal became an obsession. It would be "the dawn of a new age" (Nixon), a "breakthrough" (Ford), the first "commuting to space" (Carter).

James Gehrig, staff director of the Senate Commerce Committee's space and science subcommittee, sums up the two features that shuttle backers have cited again and again: its "wonderful advantages of higher payloads and lower costs." NASA planned the first launch for 1977. Didn't quite make it that year, and won't this year. NASA officials won't be too upset if it doesn't fly next year either—because when you're not launching them, you don't have to explain awkward things like higher costs and lower payloads.

Pole Sitting

Down at Cape Kennedy, *Columbia* lies in an assembly hangar, imprisoned in scaffolding. Arc lights gleam off its impossibly smooth surface. They shine round-the-clock, as 500 technicians work double ten-hour shifts, six days a week, trying to make the shuttle spaceworthy. *Columbia* was supposed to be finished last March, when it was transferred from the factory of the prime contractor, Rockwell International. Instead, it arrived at the Cape only 75 percent complete, according to NASA. No one is certain when—or even if—the remaining work will be finished.

The drydocked *Columbia* represents at once all the shuttle program's problems. They are: delays; cost overruns; performance underruns; and lack of work for the horse to do. Delays, the least important problem, are the easiest to understand. "People don't appreciate that the shuttle, as a technical goal, is much more ambitious than the moon program," says Eugene Covert, an MIT professor and rocket-propulsion expert. "The schedule couldn't possibly have been met."

Considering what the *Columbia* is supposed to do, it's no surprise that it didn't fly in 1977, or in 1978, or in 1979, and can't fly now. The rockets it is supposed to replace have always been throw-away affairs for very pragmatic engineering reasons: the fiendish forces of space flight twist and

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Those regular rockets the space shuttle is supposed to replace have been throw-away affairs for pragmatic engineering reasons: the fiendish forces of space flight twist and sizzle machines into scrap.

sizzle machines into scrap. Rocket engines are essentially explosions with a hole at one end. Exploding gases roar out the hole, shoving the rocket in the opposite direction. The act of firing does such violence to the rocket engine, immolating and warping its components, it's impractical to use again even if you can get it back. Yet the shuttle's main engines will have internal pressures three times greater than those of any previous large engine, NASA says—and the goal is to use them on *55 flights* before an overhaul.

To truly grasp the challenge of building a space shuttle, think about its flight. The ship includes a 60-by-15-foot open space, narrow wings, and a large cabin where men must be provided that delicately slender range of temperatures and pressures they can endure. During ascent, the shuttle must withstand 3 Gs of stress—inertial drag equivalent to three times its own weight. While all five engines are screaming, there will be acoustic vibrations reaching 167 decibels, enough to kill an unprotected person. In orbit, the shuttle will drift through -250° F. vacuum, what engineers call the "cold soak." It's cold enough to embrittle and shatter most materials. During reentry, the ship's skin goes from cold soak to 2,700° F., hot enough to transform many metals into Silly Putty. Then the shuttle must glide along, under control, at speeds up to Mach 25, three times faster than any other piloted aircraft has ever flown. After reentry, it cascades through the air without power, finally thunking down onto the runway at 220 m.p.h. The like-sized DC-9 lands, *with* power, at 130 m.p.h. Rockets are throw-away contraptions in part so that no one piece ever has to endure such a wild variety of conditions. The shuttle's design goal is to take this nightmare ride *100 times.*

The main cause of delay is currently the shuttle's refractory tiles, which disperse the heat of reentry from the ship's nose and fuselage. *Columbia* must be fitted out with 33,000 of these tiles, each to be applied individually, each unique in shape. The inch-thick tiles, made of pyrolized carbon, are amazing in two respects. They can be several hundred degrees hot on one side while remaining cool to the touch on the other. They do not boil away like the ablative heat shieldings of capsules and modules; they can be used indefinitely. But they're also a bit of a letdown in another respect—they're so fragile you can hardly touch them without shattering them.

"The tiles are the long pole holding up the tent," says Mike Malkin, NASA's shuttle project director. Fixing them to the *Columbia* without breaking them is like trying to eat a bar of Bonomo Turkish Taffy without cracking it. Most of the technicians swarming over *Columbia* are trying to glue down tiles. The tiles break so often, and must be remolded so painstakingly, the installation rate is currently one tile per technician *per week*. All this mounting was supposed to be finished before *Columbia* left Rockwell's factory. When it wasn't, the work had to be resumed at the Cape. "We've had to put up what amounts to a manufacturing facility there," says Walter Kapryan, who retired as the Cape's shuttle project director last spring. "The most we ever did for Apollo was a little patch-wiring." NASA sources privately acknowledge that *Columbia* was taken to the Cape in unfinished condition partly for public-relations value—to make it appear that preparations were accelerat-

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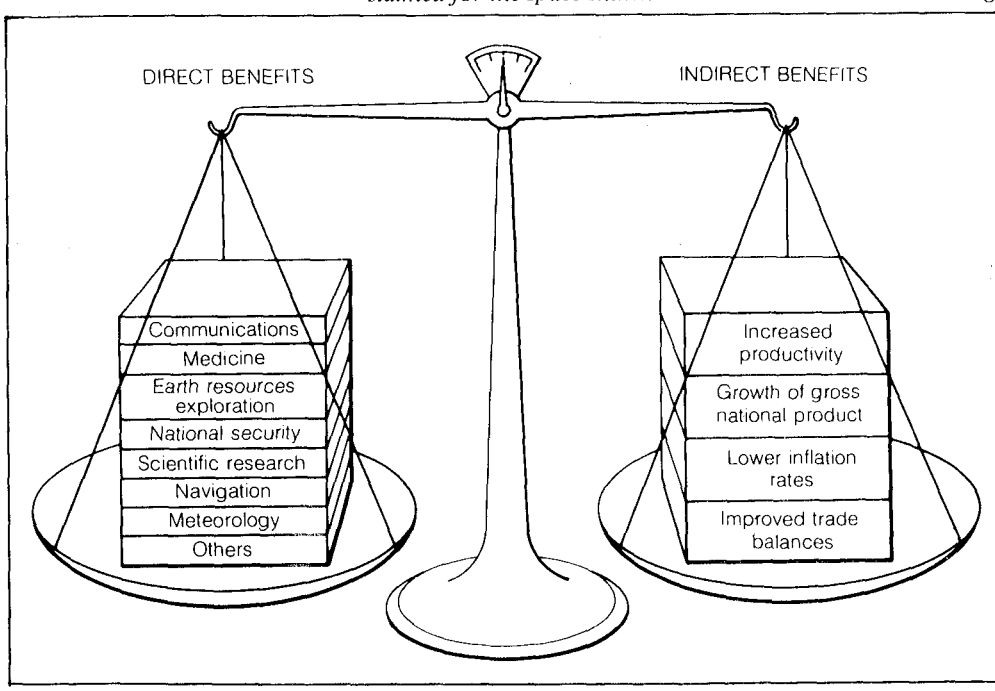
ing. The move also allows computer-testing to proceed while the tiles are being mounted. This exercise may have been practical, but it was staggering in cost: $50 million extra to attach the tiles at the Cape, according to congressional sources.

Some suspect the tile mounting is the least of *Columbia*'s difficulties. "I don't think anybody appreciates the depths of the problems," Kapryan says. The tiles are the most important system NASA has ever designed as "safe life." That means there is no back-up for them. If they fail, the shuttle burns on reentry. If enough fall off, the shuttle may become unstable during landing, and thus un-pilotable. The worry runs deep enough that NASA investigated installing a crane assembly in *Columbia* so the crew could inspect and repair damaged tiles in space. (Verdict: Can't be done. You can hardly do it on the ground.)

According to the computers, as long as you can bring the shuttle back into the atmosphere, you can fly it to the airfield even if the tiles are damaged. Former Apollo astronaut Richard Cooper doubts the computers know what they're meeping about. Many of the projections are based on the magnificent accuracy of the Apollo landings. Apollo went to the moon, came back, and dropped all its little manned modules into a target area about the size of Los Angeles International Airport. But Apollo modules were ballistic projectiles. They were slightly asymmetrical and thus had a little lift for control, but basically they fell like well-aimed stones. The science of ballistics is much more precise and predictable than the art of flying. To assume that experience with one is the same as experience with the other is to confuse a slingshot with a seagull. The only way to find out about something as big and balky as *Columbia*, Cooper says, is to launch the thing and see what happens. Computers have never flown with the unpredictable combination of damaged tiles that a shuttle may experience. They've never been whacked by a sudden, non-programmed gust of jetstream wind. They've never bounced like a twig on the crazy rapids of "bias"—the bland physics term for unexplained variations in the earth's gravitational and magnetic fields. These are the wild, uncharted rivers of space. Unknown; unknowable; beyond programming. To find out if your ship can cope with them, you have to take it up there.

You Thought It Was Only Tang? *Direct and indirect benefits claimed for the space shuttle are shown in this NASA drawing.*



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One Year and Holding

The people struggling with the tiles serve a useful function. They make the rest of the project look good by comparison. "You have to keep your pole a little shorter than everybody else's," says a NASA engineer. "That's why everybody likes to be under the tent of tile delays." The Air Force, a partner in the shuttle project, is happy to be there under the tent. It's supposed to build a small rocket booster, the Inertial Upper Stage (IUS), to ride in the shuttle bay. IUS will float away from the shuttle and fire satellites into the high altitudes that shuttles can't reach. It's based on conventional throw-away technology and should be the easiest part of the project, but it's two years behind schedule and $144 million over budget. Yet Secretary of Defense Harold Brown recently assured Congress that IUS is not a problem—because of "revised operational requirements and shuttle program delays."

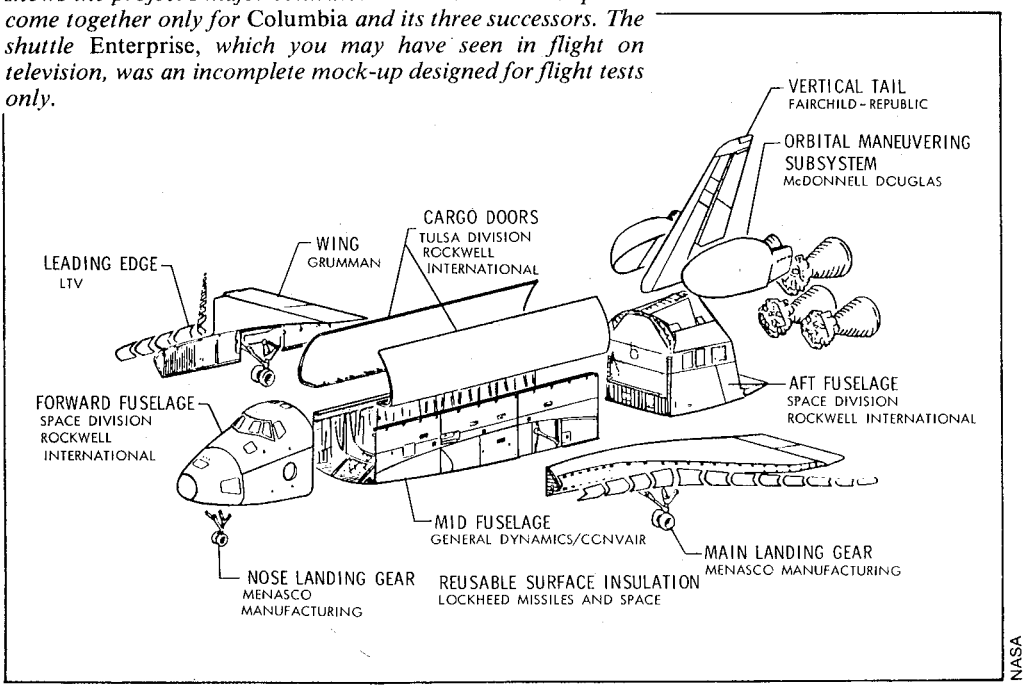
The shuttle's main engine is also lurking under the tent. *Columbia* is to be powered by the first large, high-performance "cryogenic" rocket engine, burning liquid hydrogen for fuel instead of kerosene. Cryogenic engines can achieve the impossible dream—combustion efficiency of 99 percent. But the shuttle's cryogenic engines have the annoying habit of blowing up. Not conducive to 55 reuses.

The failures, of course, are taking place on the test stand. During development, it's assumed that some engines will blow up; pushing them to the limit is part of testing. But the shuttle engines often start flaming under normal *operational* conditions. And then there was this embarrassing snag that made checking their reliability all but impossible. Although the engines must fire for 520 seconds during a shuttle flight, Rockwell's test stand held only enough fuel for 300 seconds.

For a time, engine progress looked so bleak that Congress convened a panel of National Academy of Science members to decide if the motors would *ever* work. Just after the engineers managed to get single engines to fire properly for the full duration, for instance, they tried to fire three simultaneously, as would be required during a launch. All three blew up; acoustic vibrations from one would destroy the next.

Meanwhile, down at the Johnson Space

The Horse and Its Committee: *Exploded view of a shuttle shows the project's major contractors. All these bits and pieces come together only for* Columbia *and its three successors. The shuttle* Enterprise, *which you may have seen in flight on television, was an incomplete mock-up designed for flight tests only.*



NASA

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Center in Houston, astronaut preparation was months behind even the short-pole schedule. The reason? Computer-simulators, used to stage mock failures in the flight trainer, weren't working. This was a triumph of accurate simulation, but otherwise not amusing.

Despite these problems—which have been widely discussed in the trade press since as early as 1977—NASA made routine announcements that a launch was right around the corner. The day the corner would be turned was never specified. "You'll notice that NASA always says the first shuttle will launch within the year," says Dr. Marshall Kaplan, a Penn State physicist. "I call this a 'one year and holding' countdown." The routine came close to slapstick comedy in March 1979. A cluster of three shuttle engines had just caught fire at NASA's test stand, a scant nine seconds into a test. The partially finished *Columbia* was mounted on the back of its 747 ferry plane for the flight to Cape Kennedy. The instant the 747 nosed off the field, *Columbia* began to rattle itself to pieces. Tiles flew off; tape and electrical connections began flapping everywhere. The big jet hastily banked back to the field and rolled to a stop. There was so much damage to *Columbia* after 17 minutes in the air—a Sunday afternoon stroll disabling a spaceship!—that it took a week to get her ready to go up again.

So on a fine morning in March 1979—with engines blowing up, pilots playing parcheesi to pass the time, *Columbia* melting like an icicle in routine flight—NASA announced that the first shuttle launch would be December 1979. History will record that there were no rolled eyes in Congress, no catcalls and guffaws at press conferences, no panic on the floor at Lloyd's of London. December 1979? Right. Sounds fine. Everybody wrote it down.

Since then the outlook has brightened considerably. The engines have been fired in unison several times. If it turns out they work, they will take their rightful place among the premier achievements of modern engineering (see "Because Out There is There" on page 49). Problems involving tiles continue, with residual doubt about "whether they can be relied on at all," according to the General Accounting Office. Countdown is back to minus one year and holding. NASA administrator Robert Frosch says *Columbia* will fly "between late 1980 and the first quarter of 1981." Cape Kennedy observers say the "back end" of that schedule is "possible."

A Flooded Basement

There's good and there's bad to being stuck under the tent. The good part is that Congress throws you money, hoping you will come out.

Until recently, the shuttle program had an admirable record for cost control. But NASA had made its $5 billion to $6 billion projection based on "success-oriented planning." That means it assumed everything would work the first time. Budgets were drawn as if redesigns would never be needed, as if no contingencies would arise, as if 520-second engine tests could be conducted with 300-second tanks.

Of course, NASA planners knew everything would *not* work the first time. In a complex technological project, very little works at first; delays and failures are perfectly normal. But to help the shuttle win budget approval, NASA estimated costs as if there would be no problems, according to Dan Cassidy of the House subcommittee that oversees space projects.

To be "success-oriented," NASA decided to test shuttle components only after assembling them together, instead of individually as had been the case with all previous spacecraft. If the bundle worked, great. But if it didn't, the damn thing had to be torn down and tested from scratch. NASA budgeted for only a couple of back-up engines. When they started blowing up, as every engineer knew they would—wanted them to!—the scheduling went berserk. Sitting around waiting for new engine parts to be built can cost the program up to $7.5 million a day in idle facilities and personnel, Cassidy says—much more than what would have been spent had the costs been predicted honestly in the first place. "So now we're throwing money at it," former NASA official Gray declared.

In 1979 NASA asked for, and got, a $220 million supplemental appropriation for *Columbia*. Then it asked for another $185 million, and got that. This January it asked for still another $300 million extra. Money is also being shifted from other NASA projects, mainly planetary probes that are interesting but lack immediacy, and from

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In March 1979—with engines blowing up, pilots playing parcheesi to kill time, *Columbia* melting like an icicle in routine flight—NASA announced the first launch would be in December. There were no guffaws. December 1979? Right. Everybody wrote it down.

construction of the other three shuttles, into patching *Columbia*. In all, shuttle construction is budgeted at $1.8 billion in fiscal 1981—$800 million more than NASA said it would need, according to the Congressional Research Service.

By the time all four shuttles are built, the bill for development and manufacture will come to $13 billion, GAO estimates. It'll hit $16.5 billion if you figure in NASA salaries and construction of a second shuttle launch base for the military at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. Asked about the supposed bargain basement approach of "success-oriented" planning, Richard Cooper observes "Some basements get flooded."

Considering the ambitious nature of the shuttle program, the overruns are not unspeakable. The promised $5 billion inflates to about $8 billion today. If it really costs $13 billion, that's within reason. And NASA wants you to remember all the money we'll save when *Columbia* flies. No more throw-away hardware! No more zillion-dollar towers of power crumbling into ashes downrange over the Azores! The shuttle's promise of cheap "commuting to space" will finally be realized. That's what they say. Fine—if you don't mind paying more for a "cheap" launch than for rockets you throw away.

Economy at any Price

Walk into NASA headquarters with a long enough line of credit, and you can buy yourself the top floor of a rocket. For $23 million, for instance, you can buy the services of a Delta, a rocket that will toss 2,750 pounds of whatever you have into the 22,000-mile geosynchronous orbit used by communications satellites. For $33 million, you can get the more powerful Atlas-Centaur, which could kick a small payload out of earth orbit altogether. If you plunk down $50 million or more, you could probably arrange to get a Titan III, the rocket the Air Force uses to launch military satellites. A Titan III, the Clydesdale of space horses, will heave 29,000 pounds into due-east, low orbit.

The money you pay is "total cost incurred"—NASA's price for everything associated with the launch, covering the rocket itself, the fuel, the command personnel to fire it, and the guys who sweep up the pad afterwards. Commercial rocket launches, by law, must be financially self-supporting.

If you want one of these rides, sign up now, because NASA plans to terminate all throw-away rocket launches as soon as the shuttle is working.

"The shuttle will be able to carry three Delta-class payloads," says Chet Lee, the shuttle pricing director. That means, for instance, three communications satellites and the extra boosters needed to push them to high orbits. To launch three Delta-class payloads on Deltas would cost three times $23 million—$69 million.

Compared to this, the shuttle looks like a fire sale. You can book *Columbia* for $22.4 million, Lee says. That's all you pay. A third the price of those wasteful old throw-away rockets. This is the official rationalization of the official contention that the shuttle will be cheaper.

Let's take a closer look at the numbers. NASA is using the conventional business technique of a loss-leader. For the first

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three years of shuttle flights, Lee says, "We'll make no attempt to recover all of our direct operational costs." This is necessary, he maintains, to attract customers away from disposable rockets and into the shuttle. Seems odd, since NASA would only be stealing customers from itself. So how was $22.4 million arrived at?

Back in 1972, when shuttle designs were still on the table, a consulting company called Mathematica did some cost-benefit studies for the project. Mathematica estimated that, under certain conditions, an individual shuttle flight would have a direct cost (fuel, command salaries, sweeping the pad) of $22.4 million. In 1975, NASA froze that number. It started selling contracts for shuttle launches at $22.4 million per, for the first three years of flight—a guaranteed price with no escalator for inflation.

The spirit of '75 is great for satellite customers, since the cost of regular rockets is inflating right along with the rest of reality. The 1975 estimate inflates to about $32 million today—still cheaper than our three Deltas.

What happens to the cost of shuttle

BATTLESTAR BUREAUCTICA

When the shuttle was chosen as the space project to follow Apollo, scientific potential was not its primary qualification. The best thing about the shuttle was that a man sat up front.

"The question back then was 'What can you do with a man in it?'" says Doug Lord, a NASA official who was in on the deliberations. NASA had invested heavily in manned flight—its space centers in Houston, Huntsville, Alabama, and Cape Kennedy are "geared almost exclusively to training and accommodating astronauts," GAO says.

Having a manned shuttle "provides all kinds of flexibility," says a Pentagon spokesman. "A man has judgment. He can react." What he will react to isn't clear yet, since the shuttle is still basically a ballistic projectile until it leaves space and begins landing. In space the men sit and watch the dials. Human judgment is needed only when the shuttle has to be flown home. But most of what the man flies is equipment—life support, shields, wings—designed to get him back. "It sounds unpleasant, but it's true that in space, man is in the way," says Albert Cameron, a Harvard scientist and NASA advisor. "There is very little work that requires a pair of hands."

One reason the manned shuttle exists at all is the Department of Defense's three-decade quest to get a soldier into space. During the 1950s, when DOD was sparring with the fledgling NASA for space authority, the Air Force was flying its X-15 rocket plane to the very suburbs of space. It started to build the X-20 Dyna-Soar, a reusable winged spacecraft similar in concept to the shuttle.

"DOD kept pushing it," says Pete Bush, a Boeing engineer who helped design Dyna-Soar, "even though nobody could answer the question, 'What are we going to do with it?'" After spending $500 million on Dyna-Soar, the Pentagon saw it canceled. All space money was diverted to the moon race. But the Pentagon didn't give up. Through the 1960s it spent $1 billion planning MOL—Manned Orbiting Laboratory, a permanent space station. When time came in 1969 to choose a post-Apollo project, DOD asked for MOL. It was rejected, insiders say, because there still was no answer to the question, "What are we going to do with it?"

At that point, DOD decided to play by NASA rules. It opted into the space shuttle project. Along the way it was agitating for its own launch site at Vandenberg (it won), its own shuttles (jury still out), and a new Space Division headquarters in Colorado Springs (approval likely). All this even though DOD has announced no plans to do

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flights at the end of three years? "Then our direct-launch price will go up to reflect true costs," Lee says. All the evidence is that "true" costs will be high indeed. Flying and refitting the shuttle—even assuming all goes well—will be more expensive than predicted. All the things that you used to throw away and forget about now must be returned to earth, fixed, and cobbled together for another launch. Lee says the "true cost" of a launch is "about 25 percent" more than will be charged in the first three years. The "true cost" of one flight of the shuttle thus approaches $40 million. Costs keep rising, like a rocket gushing flame and trembling to get off the pad. But NASA says the shuttle is still a bargain, payload for payload. Better keep a close eye on that cost-rocket. Once those things get moving, they really pick up speed fast. . . .

anything in space it didn't do before the shuttle.

Shuttles, you see, will be the capital ships of outer space. The Navy still lusts after aircraft carriers, even though carriers are sitting ducks for modern missiles. Carriers are grand; you need admirals to command them. The Air Force still wants B-1 bombers, even though drones will do a better job for a fraction of the price. B-1s can fly over a reviewing stand in formation; cruise missiles do not need a pre-flight pep-talk from a general with a swagger stick.

If you see the shuttle as a capital ship, you will not be surprised to learn that, when Air Force Secretary Hans Mark informed the Senate of the new Space Division, his second sentence was "The commanding officer will hold the rank of lieutenant general. . . ."

You have to sympathize. Men may not do better than robots in space, but they're certainly better on the ground. Would you want to be the general assigned to decorate a computer? "I present you with this Distinguished Flying Cross," you would have to say, "for service above and beyond the call of your programming. Would you care to say a few words?"

What's the evening news going to do with the "Meep Meep Me-Me-Me-MEEP!" that follows? And how will *Life* do a profile of the computer's family? —*G.E.*

Turn Down the Volume

What was the basis of Mathematica's cost projections? The analysts assumed that the shuttle fleet would stage at least 50 flights a year. With each vehicle having a 10-year life, that meant at least 500 flights over a 10-to-12-year period. (At one point in 1976, NASA was projecting 75 flights a year. The number has been dropping steadily since, and now stands at "around 40 to 50 flights a year," Lee says.) As with any volume merchandising, the more flights there are, the lower the cost of each individual flight. So it was important to project lots of flights. These are "safe life" numbers.

Fifty flights a year? For what? Mathematica assumed there would be 20 flights a year for something called Spacelab. Spacelab is a little workshop that rides in the shuttle bay. The shuttle goes up and opens its doors; scientists crawl from the cabin into Spacelab; they sail around doing experiments; then the shuttle snaps closed and brings the whole package back, to be outfitted for another flight. Spacelab is being built by the European Space Agency. ESA is paying for its first flight. (NASA likes to give the impression ESA is paying for *all* its flights. It is not. NASA will pay for everything after the second Spacelab cruise, Doug Lord, the Spacelab director, notes.)

Will Spacelab be used 20 times a year? "I can't imagine what for," says Albert Cameron, a Harvard physicist who is chairman of the Space Science Board of the National Academy of Science. "The duration of the flight is so short," he explained, pointing out that it will ordinarily last only four to seven days, "there's way too little time to carry out any meaningful experiments." Even Lord acknowledges that the applications of Spacelab are limited: "It's really an interim step, to demonstrate to the world that a permanent space station is a worthwhile idea." Meanwhile, will the interim step fly 20 times a year—a total of *200*

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times? "Not a chance," says an informed NASA source.

Also listed in the calculation are six flights a year for communications satellites, like those made famous by Comsat, Inc. Communications satellites fit *Columbia* just perfectly; NASA says three of them could go up on one shuttle ride.

How many communications satellites are now being launched? Two a year. Intelsat, the international consortium that is the largest private space user (Comsat is part of it), plans to send up two satellites in the next three years, a spokesman says. The satellite communications business is expanding, with RCA, Western Union, AT&T, and SBS (a venture of IBM, Aetna, and Comsat) planning to enter. But to require six shuttle launches a year, there would have to be *18 satellites*. "Barring some extraordinary breakthrough in technology," says an informed communications industry source, "that's inconceivable."

So how many shuttle flights a year seem reasonable? Maybe 20, insiders say, with the largest share devoted to launching defense satellites.

Suddenly, like a rocket veering off course, NASA's numbers are shaking. If there aren't 50 flights a year, the cost of each flight shoots up from the projected "true" cost of $40 million. It's getting closer and closer to the $69-million cost of using three Deltas, the throw-away equivalent of a shuttle.

Take a Walk

But we all know there's something the shuttle can do that rockets can't. The shuttle can recover damaged satellites. This is a widely publicized aspect of shuttle mythology—grabbing and returning to earth a satellite that has worn out or broken down, so that it can be repaired and returned to orbit later. According to a GAO study, fully *75 percent* of the shuttle program cost savings are based on Mathematica's assumptions about how much we will benefit from recovering crippled satellites.

The only problems are:

(a) The shuttle can't retrieve satellites;

(b) Nobody wants them back in the first place.

More than two thirds of the satellites being launched are sent out to geosynchronous orbits—22,000 miles up, where, relative to a spot on the rotating earth, they hang in the same place all the time. Others are sent to nearly-as-high sun-synchronous orbits, where they follow the movements of the sun.

The shuttle, on the other hand, orbits at 200 miles. The highest it could reach, unloaded, would be 600 miles. Routinely, the shuttle will fly to 200 miles and release a satellite mounted on the IUS booster, or a smaller booster called a SUS (for Spinning Upper Stage). The booster then blasts the satellite out to its final destination. Once there, it is beyond the shuttle's reach. Period. When something is 22,000 miles away, getting 200 miles closer isn't much of a help.

Cassidy of the House space subcommittee acknowledges this is "a flaw in the system."

Like most mythology, the "retrieve and return" business has a basis in fact. When the shuttle was being planned, there was supposed to be a "space tug." This was to be a robot rocket vehicle of some kind, assembled in space and left there. The shuttle would bring it fuel and satellites to move around. The tug would take a new satellite out to high orbit, then go find a damaged one and tow it back down to the shuttle.

The tug proposal has been killed. Every year NASA sticks it back in the budget under a different name, and every year it gets killed again. It gets killed because people don't want their satellites back. "A communications satellite has absolutely no salvage value," says Larry Weekly, spokesman for SBS, Inc. "They almost never fail, and by the time they wear out, after seven to ten years, they're obsolete. It's much cheaper to build a new one." Especially, Weekly adds, since the cost of a new satellite—now running $20 million to $40 million—is likely to be less than the cost of sending a repairman after an old one.

Some satellites are parked in low orbits, within *Columbia*'s reach. But even then they may exceed its grasp. A shuttle has little maneuvering power; basically, it can only intercept things in its launch path. Few existing satellites are in orbital inclinations the shuttle uses. NASA is adjusting for this by launching satellites worth recovering—$90-million spy-eyes and telescope-observatory satellites—into paths the shuttle will cross. But this doesn't

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guarantee that *Columbia* will be able to cope with them. When satellites get into trouble, they often suffer loss of stability—the gyros fail and the little robot starts tumbling wildly. NASA acknowledges that the shuttle wouldn't even try to recover an unstable satellite. How could it? What could it grab hold of? Would you pull a billion-dollar spaceship under a rumbling stellar bowling ball that might come caroming into your ice-fragile tiles?

Warp Spend

NASA has been casting about for other reasons to stage shuttle flights. The agency hoped that companies would sign up for space manufacturing tests—the search for the fabled flawless ball bearing. But so far, according to Ed Fritz of GAO, only one American firm has shown any interest. And, in order to entice it, NASA has promised to foot the bill for the full cost of the test flight, Fritz says. In return for accepting this fiscal hardship, the company gets the patent rights to anything it might develop.

The price per flight keeps climbing beyond $40 million, as the number of plausible missions decreases. But it's still less than $69 million for those three Deltas. Less, that is, until you remember that *the Deltas were already around. You didn't have to spend $13 billion to develop them.* NASA has repeatedly noted that there will be no attempt to recover—amortize, you might say—the development cost of the "cheaper" shuttle.

Suppose the shuttles fly 500 sorties, as predicted, and cost $13 billion to build. That works out to an investment cost of $26 million per flight. Add that to the $40-million "true cost" of a launch. Suddenly a shuttle launch costs $66 million—just about the same as three Deltas. Now, suppose the shuttles fly only the pessimistic 200 flights. The investment cost leaps to $65 million per flight. Suddenly the total cost of a shuttle flight becomes $105 million—almost twice the cost of three of those wasteful Delta rockets.

Of course, it once cost money to develop the Delta and the Titan and what all, and that money is not amortized to each flight. But those rockets are already developed. That money's already spent.

"Oh, the shuttle will definitely cost more than equivalent expendable rockets," said Kaplan plainly. "The payoff is not in dollars, but in flexibility and expanded horizons."

Weight a Minute...

They didn't talk much about "expanded horizons" back in 1972 when NASA was selling the shuttle as an economy move. They did talk about flexibility, though, because the shuttle payload would be greater than the other rockets'. It was supposed to be able to carry 65,000 pounds into a low orbit, launching due-east. (Because the earth spins west to east, rockets launching east get a boost from the earth's own momentum. Launching north or south to reach polar orbits bucks the spin. Nobody launches west.)

Here the "economy" calculations reach escape velocity. The 65,000-pound payload is being quietly dropped, too. "We'll be lucky if we hit 30,000 due-east," says Kaplan. *Columbia* and *Challenger*, the second shuttle, are turning out to weigh much more than planned. Every pound added to the shuttle is a pound subtracted from the payload.

The external fuel tank, for instance, is full of oxygen and hydrogen cooled to -400° F. to make the gases flow as liquids. Ice will form on the tank. When *Columbia*'s tiles started popping off in a stiff breeze, it occurred to engineers that ice chunks from the tank would crash into the tiles during the sonic chaos of launch: Goodbye, *Columbia*. So insulation was added to the tank. But while thermal cladding solves the ice problem, it adds weight. The entire vehicle, loaded, weighs 4.5 million pounds. Say you add one percent. Doesn't sound like much. One percent comes to 45,000 pounds. That's almost all of the payload.

Discovery and *Atlantis*, the third and fourth shuttles, are slated to have stronger tiles and lighter components. They may be able to lift 65,000 pounds. Meanwhile, remember the Titan III, lifting 29,000 pounds for about $50 million? "Getting only a 30,000 payload from the shuttle is a giant step backward, compared to the Titan," says Albert Cameron. "But it's a moot point now to argue about the practical virtues of the rocket. NASA has eliminated it. You have no choice but to launch on the shuttle, do you?" Indeed,

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NASA has even eliminated the word "rocket." Jack Mahon, NASA's Expendable Launch Director, says they are now called "ELVs"—Expendable Launch Vehicles. Surely you remember that fabled day in 1926 when Robert Goddard, father of modern rocketry, lit off the first liquid-fueled rocket engine, sending a device the size and shape of a coat tree screaming into the low clouds over Auburn, Massachussetts? Remember how he called to his wife, "Come quick, dear, I've invented the expendable launch vehicle!"

Spyless Sky

The original reason the shuttle was supposed to lift 65,000 pounds was to satisfy not commerce or science, but the Defense Department. DOD plans to launch all its military spy satellites on the shuttle, using NASA tracking facilities and astronauts. "DOD was brought into the shuttle planning because they wanted something big with a lot of payload," Doug Lord explains. "Without DOD, there would have been no reason to make the shuttle so big."

DOD's chief concern was being able to launch south over the poles, where sun-synchronous orbits are available. In such orbits, a spy satellite's cameras see the same sun conditions every day. A shuttle launching 65,000 pounds due-east was supposed to have enough energy to lift 40,000 pounds over the poles. But as time went on, DOD began to perceive that *Columbia* couldn't even come close. So DOD got funds to build a "thrust augmentation package"—yet another set of engines to be strapped to the shuttle conglomeration.

The "thrust package" will be an abbreviated first stage of a Titan rocket—two motors and four fuel tanks. Fitting under the shuttle's fuel tank, it will generate enough thrust to lift an extra 10,000 to 20,000 pounds. The cost is $10 million a shot, NASA says—there go those *costs*, picking up speed again—and it will not be reusable. Tumbles into the ocean like those despised old rockets.

This doesn't dampen DOD's enthusiasm for the shuttle project. Air Force Secretary Hans Mark recently told Congress: "It is important to exploit the shuttle. . . because as far as we know, the Russians have nothing like it." (It is believed the Klingons have nothing like it, either.) DOD campaigned long and hard to get its own shuttle launchers, at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. Since Cape Kennedy could already accommodate more shuttle flights than were planned, it was hard for DOD to justify $4 billion to build and operate another base. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that, after a polar launch from Cape Kennedy, the empty fuel tank would tumble away and burn up in the skies over Russia. After a polar launch from Vandenberg, it would not. Russia might interpret a burning fuel tank as a nuclear attack, the Chiefs warned. The fact that Russian instruments would immediately identify the launch as that of an unarmed shuttle—or that we could notify them of the launch via Mailgram, at a fraction of the cost of a telegram or a Vandenberg base—was discounted. The Chiefs prevailed.

Because of the delays, DOD has ordered six more Titan IIIs to ensure launch capacity for the next two years' worth of spy satellites. Beyond that, however, no more Titan production is planned, according to Jack Boyd of Martin-Marietta, the rocket's builder. "By the mid-1980s," says Defense Secretary Brown, "we will be almost totally dependent on the shuttle for our national security space missions." No alternative but to rely on an untested system. Wonder if the Russians have one of those?

Scotty, Beam Us Out

Technical problems are just that: technical. Much of what's wrong with the shuttle will someday be fixed. If money is no object, as it usually isn't in space launches, we can pay more for reusable shuttles than for throw-away rockets if we have to. But the question never answered is—what will the shuttle *do* that rockets couldn't do?

It can't launch more than they can; sometimes, it can't launch as much. (Even the 65,000-pound target pales compared to the 250,000 pounds a Saturn V could hoist.) It can't bring back satellites. It can't keep a space station aloft even a fraction as long as Skylab stayed up there. It has no scientific value. It just has men in the front

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seats... and an enormous amount of weight and equipment devoted to bringing them, and an empty cargo bay, back in one piece. It's a horse trained to gallop in a circle; the men are there to ride the thing back to the barn, and the horse has to be big and powerful and expensive because it carries men.

There is something noteworthy a rocket can do that the shuttle *cannot*. A rocket can be permitted to fail. What if a billion-dollar spaceship wipes out on a "routine" mission "commuting" to space with some puny little satellite? Cooper fears it might drive a stake through the heart of the manned space program. Would the public stand to lose a quarter of the fleet in a single day? Would it fork over another billion dollars to build a replacement? Would it stand for spending millions to train astronauts to be truck drivers, only to lose truck and drivers both? The prospect makes the old rockets seem kind of nice. One of the old throw-away jobs could go haywire, and spiral down into the ocean off the Bahamas, and everybody would feel miserable and millions would be wasted and everybody would go back to work. Lost it, dammit—but then nobody ever expected it back.

What if a billion-dollar spaceship wipes out on a 'routine' mission 'commuting' to space with some puny little satellite?

You Only Go Around Once

The shuttle is the first space vehicle that can't be test-fired unmanned, Cooper points out. Pilots have to crawl in and light the candle and go. A couple of guys who ought to know better have to wrestle with that stick and call out the numbers and write when they get there. Then we'll know.

It goes like this. During blast-off, unlike those capsules and modules with escape rockets to pull the pilots free in case of trouble, there is no way out of the shuttle. *Columbia* has ejection seats like a jet fighter, but they're useless during take-off. Punching out at several thousand m.p.h. doesn't work. If the slab of rushing air doesn't kill you, the engine exhaust flames will.

Here's the plan. Suppose one of the solid-fueled boosters fails. The plan is, you die. Solid rockets can fail in two ways. They can explode; enough said. Or they can shut down spontaneously. If a booster shuts down, there will be 2.5 million pounds of thrust on one side battling zero pounds on the other. Even a split second of this imbalance will send the ship twisting into oblivion, overriding any application of pilot skill.

Suppose one of the shuttle's three main engines fails. You have a fighting chance. You blow the boosters off. Then, using the throttles on the remaining engines, you try to turn the beast around. It's screaming and trembling, a vicious wounded animal. There's that damn fuel tank hanging there, and it has all the aerodynamic grace of the Temple of Karnak. But it's got the fuel. Ditch it and you've got no engines.

If you get twisted back around toward the Cape, you blow the fuel tank off and glide home. If the beast is too badly wounded to land, but you can slow it down to a few hundred m.p.h. before you splat into the water, you're okay. At that speed you can eject.

But you're in luck—the launch goes fine. Once you get into space, you check to see if any tiles are damaged. If enough are, you have a choice between Plan A and Plan B. Plan A is hope they can get a rescue shuttle up in time. Plan B is burn up coming back.

But let's not worry about the tiles. The tiles should be okay. They're certainly spending enough time on them. So once you get back into the atmosphere, the mad joyride begins. You have no power now, the engines are spent and switched out. You get one shot at a landing. Originally

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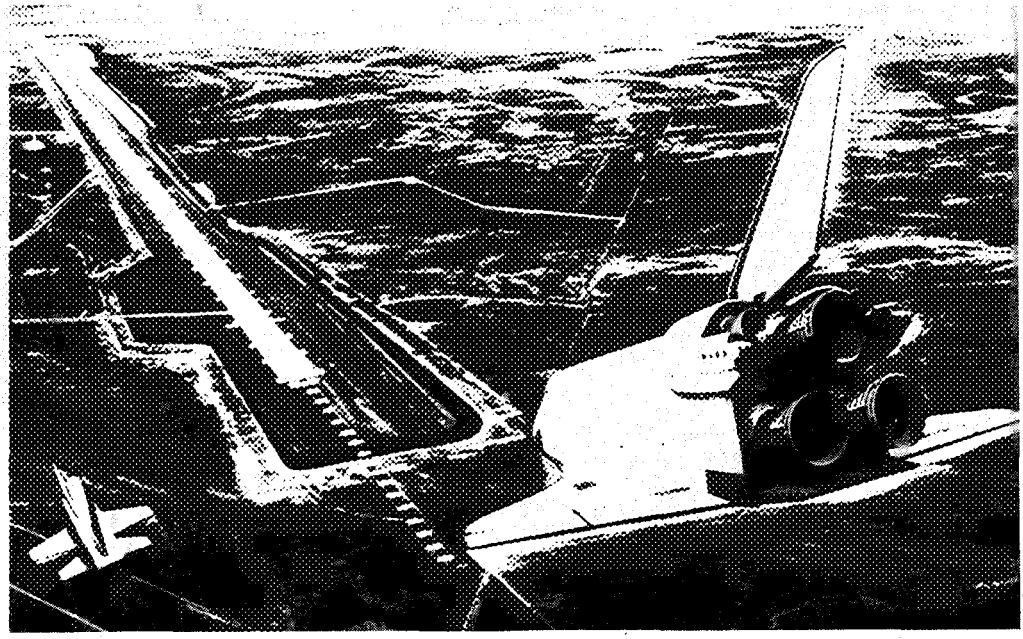

NASA

Chase pilot: *"Say, Scott, who's your insurance company?"*
Shuttle pilot: *"New England Life, of course. . . why do you ask?"*

the plans called for a couple of regular jet engines to give you enough power to maneuver, or maybe go around for a second approach if the first one doesn't line up right. But jet engines got killed in the cost-cutting. A billion-dollar ship, and this is how they were cutting costs. . . .

The shuttle starts rubbing air at Mach 25—25 times the speed of sound. At 250,000 feet, you have a little control with the reaction thrusters. By 80,000 feet, they've shut off, and you're gliding. It's silent in the ship. Just the air rushing by and the computers meeping to each other. Biting into the denser air, your elevators and speed brakes lend some control. You can still maneuver "cross range"—several hundred miles north or south relative to your approach from the west. But there are only 15 runways and lake beds in the world where you can land, so don't get carried away.

Cross-range maneuvering is no longer possible by 50,000 feet. You're locked in, wherever you're going. Now you have company. Fighter planes—"chase planes"—have picked you up. They're swarming all around you, snooping around the hull for damage. Eighteen miles from the runway, you finally slow to subsonic speed. Now you really have some options. At this low speed and altitude, you could punch out safely.

At 12,000 feet, the plummeting begins. Nose down at 24 degrees to the horizon, 30 degrees in some flights. Feels like a dive bomber. That DC-9, the one that makes your knuckles white on commercial flights, comes in at *three* degrees. Thirty seconds out, you can raise the nose back up. Now you have one and only one chance to lower the landing gear. No time to cycle them. If the gear don't lock, that's it. The chase planes are coming right down to the strip with you, following your every move like baby ducks. They snoop around the landing gear. Locked? If not, the chase pilots have a couple seconds to tell you to bail out.

Only a few more seconds. The ground isn't coming up; some prankster from Hell is *throwing* it at you. Whack! *Down* at 220 m.p.h. Hope the rubber in those tires didn't blow from that long cold soak. Crack! You bounce along, you roll to a stop.

Good thing you didn't have to punch out. Only *Columbia* will have ejection seats. "The whole philosophy is that the shuttle is like a commercial airliner," Day explains. "You test everything like mad, but once it's checked out, you take your chances."

Now, let's check. Is the hull intact? Better be. NASA says it will turn this ship around and have it flying again in two weeks—only 96 of those hours for "safing" and refitting. Did all that stress—stress that would have twisted any other flying machine into a croissant—pop off any of your tiles? Let's hope not. The cost-cutting plan says NASA will have to replace only 1.4 percent of them after each flight. It's right here in the cost-cutting plan, right under "C"—"Commuting to space." ■

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Because Out There Is There

Why not take all that space money, it's often asked, and use it here on earth, to end poverty, intolerance, and crowded buses?

The first answer is usually, "All that money isn't all that much." True enough, NASA gets less than one per cent of the federal budget. But that's a refutation, not a reason.

The next answer is usually, "Because of all the wonderful spin-offs from space." True, everyday life has benefited from digital watches and Tang. Industry, more important, has gotten hints on how to make things better, especially lightweight materials like Lexan. But if you want new research products, nothing could be more circuitous than sending out for them by way of the moon. The American space program so far has cost $100 billion. Even part of that sum, farmed into pure research, would have returned many more usable products than space development has.

Consider the space shuttle's marvelous cryogenic engines. They are light, small, highly efficient. Since they burn liquid oxygen and hydrogen for fuel, their exhaust is not noxious gases, but steam.

Within this engine is a remarkable device, a turbopump for pressurizing the propellants. The pump weighs 760 pounds and generates 75,000 horsepower—more than *a thousand horsepower per pound*! Your car's engine produces maybe half a horsepower per pound. The pump is a breathtaking—almost beautiful—achievement of engineering.

But the whole damn engine and its wonderful pump are good for nothing but making a rocket fly. If you wanted to develop that pump—which surely offers important insights to industrial pump-makers—you didn't need to surround it with a space shuttle to do so.

Then is there is a cause for going to space? Yes, but one the shuttle project does not serve. Man must constantly seek to expand his field of vision. Our desire for growth is a pure and positive aspect of man's character. The itch to know is something we should always scratch.

The trip to the moon could be justified only by this reason, this article of faith. *We had to know.* It wasn't of much practical value, and most people understood that. So too with the planetary probes. Who was not transfixed for an instant when Viking sent back the first pictures from Mars, and we all gasped, "The air there is pink!"

The shuttle project does not claim this article of faith. It claims to be fiscally and technically practical, so it is open to a line of criticism from which the moon program was exempt. The shuttle simply can't do anything the old rockets couldn't do, won't save money, and won't help us learn anything we couldn't learn with probes on the old rockets. "We can't keep on using rockets that were designed 20 years ago," A congressional aide and key shuttle proponent said to me in defense of the project. "It's degrading." No it's not. It's sensible.

Draining money into the shuttle has caused delays and downgrading for Project Galileo, a complex probe that will orbit Jupiter, pull close to each of its 12 moons, then plunge into the planet's seething atmosphere. A probe to meet Halley's Comet has been canceled. A probe to investigate the polar regions of the sun—invisible from earth—has been shelved.

We need space money for *these* projects, not to whiz around at Mach 25 trying to raise Vandenberg on the squawkbox. Anything we need to know about things near earth where the shuttle can go, we can launch an old-fashioned rocket to discover. Meanwhile, we have no idea what's going on *out there*. We have no idea what we'll find. And that's exactly why we have to go there.

—*G.E.*

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'Massive Retaliation, in Times and Places of Our Own Choosing'

United Press International files this dispatch from the front:

"In another move to punish the Soviet Union for invading Afghanistan, the United States put tighter restrictions on Aeroflot charter flights to and from the United States.

"The Civil Aeronautics Board ordered the Soviet national airline to request permission for charter flights at least 30 days in advance. No such requirement was imposed previously."

Tidbits & Outrages

Forgive Me, Mr. President, But You Know How *Playboy* Takes Things Out of Context

Pat Caddell, Carter's pollster, almost lost his White House pass before he caught himself in this interview with *Playboy*:

"Playboy: Yet you've apparently attained a level of power that no other opinion surveyor ever has.

"Caddell: Yeah? Well, if I had half the power people think I do, we might not be in the fix. . . . No, I'm not going to say that!"...

And We'll Have to Buy a Farmhouse to Watch the Progress From. . . .

The National Endowment for the Arts—that patron of things true and beautiful which recently gave an "artist" $12,000 to make a 30-second film of himself shooting and killing a helpless dog—is at it again.

According to NEA sources, the Amarillo Arts Center in Amarillo, Texas, is about to get $37,000 to take pictures of wheat from space. The center's David Turner told *The Washington Monthly* he plans to grow wheat in a 16-square-mile pattern that, from space, would appear as a prairie stake.

"It will be a great sight for space explorers visiting earth to see," Turner noted.

In case the ovations from space explorers are slow in coming, the center will ask NASA to photograph the stake using its Landsat survey satellite. Photos from Landsat, Turner said, cost exactly $5 each. Then why is $37,000 required? NEA apparently was told, "First we have to grow the wheat. . . ."

We Also Served the Stolichnaya in Dirty Glasses

Elsewhere in this issue ("Draft the Rich!" page 24), the editor of this magazine questions the patriotism of the rich. In the interest of fair reporting, we note certain evidence to the contrary:

First, there is Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, who gave an elegant party for 300 guests at the Lake Placid Club during the Winter Olympics. "I wanted to do something patriotic," she explained, "and this was the most patriotic thing I could do."

Then there is this report from Richard Hudson of *The Wall Street Journal*:

"PHILADELPHIA—Afraid of the draft? Well, you could always sign up for a six-year hitch with a National Guard troop. Not just any troop, of course. Consider one that makes its mess on caviar and pickled herring, takes its furloughs in the Thousand Islands, sets its bivouac on Philadelphia's fashionable Main Line, and fills its morning roll call with old Philadelphia names like Biddle, Coxe, Hopkinson, Stokes and Strawbridge.

"That's Troop A, First Squadron, 104th Cavalry, 28th Division, Pennsylvania Army National Guard. At least that's what the generals in Washington call it. But the troopers know better, for within the ranks of the troop they've formed what is 'probably the most expensive club in Philadelphia,' says one member, Sgt. David Biddle Stokes.

"The club, which is called the First City Troop, is also one of the oldest and most exclusive. In fact, it is so exclusive that not every trooper can join it. Its history is one of catering to the upper crust, and for generations it has been *the* society for the sons of Philadephia's foremost families.

"'It's a tradition of gentlemen banding together in service to their country,' says its moustachioed former commander, Capt. Alexander Kerr. His fellow officers, dining on china plate during weekend Guard duty, nod in agreement. . . ."

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WHERE ARE YOU, BENITO, NOW THAT WE NEED YOU?

Along the Northeast Corridor, only the excuses run on time

by Graham Beene

It was sunny as my train left Washington's Union Station last September. I was traveling to Boston to visit some old college friends, and I was in a good mood. My seat was comfortable, the interior of the car was modern, the woman sitting next to me was minding her own business. A few minutes out, I slipped off into a half-sleep, filled with memories of the places and friends I was returning to see. There was none of the wrenching and jostling, lurching and swaying I had grown accustomed to during my past few years as an Amtrak patron, and as reverie stole up on me the memories became more vivid. It was as if time had slowed its pace for my benefit... wait a minute. A glance at my watch confirmed my suspicions. Time was not standing still. All that had stopped was my train.

It had been close to an hour, I discovered, since my train—"The Minuteman"—had wrenched, jostled, lurched and swayed to a halt just south of Wilmington, Delaware. I was going to be late, but that came as no surprise. Delay has become a fact of life on the stretch of rail from Washington to Boston ever since Amtrak began the so-called Northeast Corridor Improvement Project (NECIP) four years ago. We passengers are patient and tolerant, however, because we know the delays are all in a good cause—the best cause, you might say. For after a decade of trundling over a decaying roadbed at sub-automotive speeds, trying to meet fairy-tale timetables, Amtrak was finally bringing its trains into the Twentieth Century. That, at any rate, was what they told us on the cover of our schedules, which carried the prominent warning "Amtrak is undertaking major track rehabilitation on the Northeast Corridor. We regret any delays which may occur while this work progresses." That's what they repeated on the scripted announcements over the train loudspeaker, and that's what you heard when you dialed the handy phone number printed on the timetable to hear an apologetic recorded voice estimate the various delays along the route and thank you for your patience.

Most of all, that's what they had said back in 1976 when Congress passed the Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform Act—commonly called the "4R Act." The Northeast Corridor project was part of that bill, and at the time, there hardly seemed to be anything that more clearly needed doing. The nation was coming out of Energy Crisis I, shocked at its vulnerability to a cut-off of oil supplies, determined, we told ourselves, not to let it

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Remember the vision of soaring bridges, straightened curves, and 150 m.p.h. trains? Forget it.

happen again. Trains were the most fuel-efficient means of long-distance transportation around, everyone agreed. Of course the critics charged that people wouldn't ride them, that they loved their cars, that the trains restricted their mobility. No use pouring money down that hole, they said. Except for one place: the Northeast Corridor. There, even the critics agreed, the trains made sense. You had a string of cities close together—Boston, New Haven, New York, Philadelphia, Wilmington, Baltimore, Washington—not much question where most of the interstate travelers in that part of the country were going. And you had a population that was used to riding trains—had ridden trains, in fact, for decades, even in the face of declining service. Revitalize the service—smooth out the roadbed and get some of those really modern high-speed trains like they have in Japan running along this corridor—and it was a mortal lock you'd lure plenty of those urban Easterners out of their cars.

Thoughts like this were bubbling in Congress' brain when it passed, by a wide majority, a bill designating $3.6 billion for improvements along the Northeast Corridor. The legislation provided for an entirely new transportation system. Modern trains would pick up passengers at newly remodeled stations, whisking them to their destinations at speeds of 150 miles per hour. The trains would be quiet, smooth and reliable, and an entirely new track structure, with softened curves and a new electrification grid, would eliminate the maintenance headaches that have plagued Amtrak since its inception.

Unfortunately, a budget-conscious administration was not as smitten with this vision as Congress was, and President Ford openly stated he would veto the 4R Act if it ever reached his desk. The price was too high; Transportation Secretary William Coleman called the proposed system a "luxury" the nation couldn't afford. By the time the Congress and the President struck a compromise, the cost of NECIP had been whittled down to a bargain-basement price of $1.75 billion. But the speed and the service this money would buy still sounded pretty mouth-watering to the average Amtrak passenger. In fact, in order to make sure the compromise 4R Act accomplished its purpose, Congress outlined in the statute itself what it had in mind. The project was to be completed quickly, by 1981. Once the curves were straightened and the roadbed improved, trains would be capable of reaching speeds of 120 miles per hour—fast enough!—and the trip times would be lowered to a reliable two hours and 40 minutes from Washington to New York, three hours and 40 minutes between New York and Boston. Since the trains regularly were taking four and five hours, respectively, to cover those same distances, it would be a pretty dramatic improvement—enough, the lawmakers anticipated, to attract 26.4 million energy-saving passengers a year instead of the 9.7 million riding in 1976. Finally, Congress wasn't about to give up on its 150-m.p.h. dreams: the act specified "the accomplishment of the required improvements in a manner compatible with accomplishment in the future of additional improvements in service levels."

State officials along the corridor had other reasons for endorsing the wonderful

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vision of the 4R Act. They called it the most beneficial public works effort in their region. As the railroads opened up the West a century ago, the corridor project would redeem the Northeast. With trip times slashed, it would be faster to ride than to fly (counting time to and from the terminals), relieving saturated airports and making them safer and more efficient. Radically improved passenger and freight capacity would stem the Northeast's outflow of population and industry—the railway, NECIP proponents said, was a "spine" supporting the sagging infrastructure of the region. One New Jersey transportation official likes to recall the wreathed funeral train of Robert Kennedy moving slowly down the corridor, past the crumbling, dilapidated stations of Trenton, Wilmington, and Baltimore. To him, that summed up the plight of the whole area. NECIP was going to relieve the sadness.

Well, forget it. Less than a year away from its alleged completion date, NECIP is a shambles. Only a small fraction of the proposed work has actually been completed. More important, it is becoming increasingly clear that many of the improvements envisioned by Congress will never be completed. The congressional dreams of a fuel-efficient, modern rail system—the same dreams that console the Amtrak passengers listening to explanations of the latest delay—will remain just that.

All Aboard....

When NECIP was signed into being by Gerald Ford in 1976, overall responsibility for the project was given to the Federal Railroad Administration, a branch of the Department of Transportation created in 1968 to develop a national policy on rail transportation. Now it is tempting to assume that an agency named the Federal Railroad Administration will have a lot of people on its staff who know about railroads. But the truth is more subtle. The agency has only eight people within its staff of 75 who have any railroad background, and only four of those are in the 40-person NECIP project office. What kind of experience do the rest of the FRA officials have? They are very good at building highways. An agreement between the Federal Highway Administration and the FRA allows the two agencies to borrow staff from each other should one be caught shorthanded, as FRA was when the Northeast Corridor Project started. (So although this arrangement currently means that our railroads are being built by highway experts, it theoretically would allow us, at some point in the future, to enjoy highways planned by railroad experts.)

What about Amtrak, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation that actually operates trains on the corridor? Amtrak was to be the FRA's chief contractor, with responsibility for performing the vital track work. The two agencies were not an ideal match, however. In fact, over the years they had come to regard each other with a measure of suspicion, if not outright distrust. Amtrak tended to see FRA as a short-sighted group of budget-cutters who regarded trains as a "luxury." For FRA's part, it saw Amtrak as unaccountable, independent of federal control except when it was asking for public money to cover its soaring deficit. Amtrak had experience with railroads, all right—and those experiences were one of the reasons the FRA wanted to keep tight control over NECIP.

Moreover, whatever experience Amtrak had running railroads, it had little experience in *building* them, particularly not in a project of NECIP's magnitude, undertaken on a "live" track used by both freight and passenger trains. So FRA looked at Amtrak, and Amtrak looked at FRA—warily, at arm's length—and they both came to the conclusion that neither knew how to repair the Northeast Corridor. Then they did the only logical thing: they hired a contractor to do it for them. In this case the contractor was DeLeuw, Cather, Parsons Associates (DCP), a large architectural/engineering consortium. DCP would provide the project's overall design, as well as inspect Amtrak's construction work to make sure it was done right.

The arrangement did not get off to a propitious start. In fact, during the first full year of the five-year project *no* construction work was completed. It seems that after the 4R Act was passed, FRA had $1.75 billion and five years to spend it, but no plan for how to turn that money and time into a better rail system. "Planning" is one of those words that managerial types

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use so often that the rest of us begin to think it is meaningless—but in this case it isn't. Before you build a railroad, it helps to know how you are going to do it. Someone has to decide where the track is going to go. If there is a curve you have to decide whether or not to straighten it. When the track comes to a river you have to decide if the existing bridge will be strong enough to keep the train from falling into the river; if not, you must decide whether to build a new bridge or fix the old one. You must design the bridges and curves, and arrange for the right materials to be in the right place at the right time. Even though the Northeast Corridor had been the object of sporadic study for 15 years and intense study for two, these questions struck FRA like Socratic revelations, and a full work season was consumed amassing designs, materials, and staff. In March 1977 the new Transportation secretary, Brock Adams, publicly expressed displeasure with FRA's progress and pledged to get the project underway if he had to do "pick and shovel work" on it himself. Still, it wasn't until August of that year that FRA produced the first listing of the specific bridges, curves, and sections of track that were to be improved.

And it was only when track work finally got started, in 1977, that everyone involved with the project began to realize it was in trouble. The problem, NECIP officials would later testify, was "unclear lines of authority," "a cross-confusion over roles and responsibilities." In simpler language, none of the three agencies knew what it was supposed to be doing, a result that might have been anticipated by anyone who looked at the convoluted relationship between the FRA, Amtrak, and DCP. Running the project would have been difficult enough even if each organization had a history of close cooperation with the others. But the truth was exactly the opposite, and the arrangement came to be known as the "three-headed monster." What FRA planned turned out to be different from what DCP designed, which in turn bore little resemblance to what Amtrak actually built. No one who worked on the project was particularly surprised, for example, when Amtrak installed 50,000 ties that failed to meet FRA specifications. (Rather than delay construction, Amtrak continued to accept and install the ties. The problem was finally resolved—by lowering the specifications.) And, although the DCP-FRA contract gave DCP "responsibility" for NECIP "implementation," even if the contractors saw Amtrak workers installing the ties upside down they could not direct them to do the job right. DCP had no authority over Amtrak crews. Instead of preventing deficient work, DCP could only report it to FRA, which could then direct Amtrak to correct any construction inadequacies.

As the FRA cheerfully explained: 'Projects of this size always have surprises. . . ."

As the work proceeded from crisis to crisis, progress—despite the full year of planning—was abysmal. In 1977, the first year of actual construction, Amtrak completed only 54.5 percent of the track work planned for that year, at 130 percent of the budgeted cost. In 1978 progress improved somewhat—to 57 percent completed at 83 percent of budget. At that rate, the Union Pacific would have nailed the Golden Spike about the same day Greyhound opened its San Francisco bus terminal. But this wasn't like the old days, when all it seemed to take to build a railroad was several hundred indigent laborers, an engineer, and a foreman with a shotgun. Modern railroads are different, and between the DCP officials who negotiated with the FRA officials, who in turn directed the Amtrak officials, NECIP had established a new labor/management ratio. During the 1978 work season approximately 1,700 people were managing the

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project (800 in DCP alone) while only about 1,300 people were out on the tracks doing construction work.

Meanwhile, other problems were cropping up. A DCP review of Amtrak's purchases found almost $3 million in ties, rails, and other materials in excess of project requirements. Amtrak's own internal audit turned up inaccurate payroll records and erroneous production reports, including a $16-million discrepancy between the equipment and spare parts shown on the books and what was in the warehouses. The confusion was probably only the result of shoddy bookkeeping, but Amtrak, unable to untangle its own records, called in the FBI. A call to the FBI field office in Philadelphia will find the Bureau still untangling.

As these annoying little tales began to spread, the three principal actors began to snipe at each other. "I think they are up to their ears" (Amtrak president Paul Reistrup, referring to the FRA); ". . . has not demonstrated the ability to plan, supervise, and execute work with even a remote semblance of good management," (a DCP employee referring to Amtrak). But they did more than squabble—they took action. For one thing, they reorganized. FRA has had four NECIP directors since the 4R Act was passed, and Amtrak's Northeast Corridor division has undergone at least eight reorganizations since 1976. As a result, at any given moment a large percentage of NECIP employees are either new, inexperienced, or making arrangements to leave. "There is no such thing as job continuity on the Northeast Corridor," one Amtrak official stated.

For its part, FRA took the next logical step: it hired three contractors to oversee the work of the first contractor, DCP (whose job it was, remember, to oversee Amtrak). These additional contractors have cost $14.3 million, but the value of their contribution is in dispute. The consulting firm of Arthur Andersen, for example, was retained to develop "management systems" for NECIP. FRA and Amtrak were unable to agree on the value of Andersen's advice, however, and it was ignored—after $3 million had been spent. A GAO report, issued in early 1979, concluded tersely that "the contractors—except DCP—hired to provide technical expertise for FRA should be terminated."

The GAO report caught FRA by surprise, and the agency decided to respond firmly. It summoned both DCP and Amtrak to the negotiating table to hammer out a "Memorandum of Understanding," allocating once and for all responsibility for the Northeast Corridor. A line from the "MOU," as it is called, captures its flavor: "As contractor to FRA, DCP acts as an extension of FRA, but has no authority to act for FRA in FRA relationships with Amtrak except through specific delegations of authority made by FRA to DCP with the consent of Amtrak." But Amtrak's responsibility couldn't be nailed down so simply. There is, for example, the following provision: "In recognition of the uncertainties associated with work on a live railroad, Amtrak's obligation to perform work within schedule and budget estimates is explicitly limited to the exercise of its best efforts." This isn't what lawyers would call an ironclad guarantee. An "amended MOU" is on the way.

Redirect Your Expectations

Such efforts came too late, however. The delays and waste during the first two years of the project assured that it couldn't be completed within the time, or the budget, specified in the 4R Act. So in 1979, the Department of Transportation completed a "Project Redirection Study" that confronted this reality, and the FRA translated the most important parts of the study into legislation now before Congress. Among other things, the "Northeast Corridor Completion Act of 1979" redirects the completion date of the project five years into the future (although the clock doesn't start ticking until the legislation is passed, so even if Congress acted tomorrow, NECIP wouldn't be finished until 1985). It also redirects an additional $750 million into the project, although there seems to be little pretense within the project's management that this will see it through to completion. As the FRA cheerfully explained: "The estimates generated under the redirection effort reflect the best and most accurate now available; however, no illusion of precision should be inferred. Projects of this size always have surprises, usually unpleasant." Or, as a DCP engineer told me, "$750 million is just not going to be enough."

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Of course, cost overruns—particularly with inflation climbing through the teens—are about as surprising these days as a courtroom confession in the closing minutes of *Perry Mason*. And, in fairness to the guilty, the 4R Act's original budget figure of $1.75 billion was probably selected more because it was agreeable to both Congress and the Ford administration than because it bore a relationship to any specific package of improvements to be carried out on the Corridor. The route was originally constructed in the nineteenth century, and has been neglected for decades by the failing railroads that operated along the corridor before the federal government stepped in in the early '70s. The cost of performing the deferred maintenance alone has probably exceeded a billion dollars.

The average Amtrak rider, twiddling his thumbs on a siding in Wilmington, and the average driver guzzling his way along the New Jersey Turnpike because he didn't have time to wait on that siding, probably would have the same reaction to the cost overruns: Who cares? As long as the damn thing gets built, and I can get to New York in less than three hours, what's a little overrun? (The Japanese, after all, are spending as much for a single tunnel in their high-speed system as we're spending on the entire Northeast Corridor.) In fact, since the inflation that has helped drive up NECIP's costs is caused, in large part, by the skyrocketing price of the very oil an efficient train system would save, you could argue the system has become *more* necessary, even as its costs have risen.

That's why the heart of the NECIP fiasco is not just how much money it's costing, but what we're getting for our money—which, in short, is nothing like what we were told we were getting. At each stage, as the "three-headed monster" that runs NECIP consumed more time and money, the FRA reacted by paring down the "scope" of the project. I don't mean paring down from the $3.6-billion "luxury" budget killed by the Ford administration, but from the $1.75-billion project finally authorized. This was the third element of the "project redirection," the quiet lowering of expectations. The process in itself has meant wasted money, since FRA has eliminated proposed improvements that it had already paid DCP to design (a GAO sampling found that 40 percent of NECIP's design dollars went for projects that will not be completed).

But mainly it means that we should forget the vision of dramatically improved, high-speed rail service along the Northeast Corridor. In a different atmosphere, the FRA might have been able to go to Congress and say, "Look, this project is more necessary than ever, and this is what we will need to finish it." But by now a promise from the Iranian government to finish the job would have as much credibility on Capitol Hill; NECIP has the smell of a boondoggle about it, offering little assurance that money spent on the project will be translated into better rail service rather than more embarrassment. The original budget has been frittered away, and Congress isn't about to authorize any more than it can get away with.

So forget, for example, the idea of soaring new bridges that avoid the need for Amtrak's trains to slow down as they speed to their destinations. When first planned in 1977, the project was to replace or rehabilitate over 400 bridges along the corridor. But when its money began to disappear, FRA axed $188 million from the budget—and 151 bridges in need of repairs were allowed to stay the way they were. Of the bridges that will still get NECIP's attention, half of the ones that were to be replaced are only going to be repaired.

Of the bridges cut from the project, some desperately need fixing. One of these crosses the Hackensack River in the New Jersey Meadowlands. Pieces of its superstructure are missing, and what remains is seriously rusted. Bolts are loose or gone entirely, and the main pier is severely damaged, having been rammed by an occasional barge. A DCP engineer with whom I spoke apologized for not being able to provide more details, but his own visit to the bridge had been cut short when a rotted tie almost dropped him into the river.

At hearings before the House Government Activities and Transportation subcommittee, James A. Caywood, DCP's Northeast Corridor Project director, put the bridge problem in more abstract, but barely reassuring, terms: "We have it down to a pretty low level; it will be all right, it will be safe, as long as Amtrak has the money to maintain their property. If they don't, and we don't fix these bridges up

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Curves are a big reason why Amtrak's trains, which can do 115 m.p.h., average less than half that. But none of the curves scheduled to be straightened will be.

under the improvement program, we are going to have troubles."

Then there are those curves that were supposed to be straightened. The effect of curves on the operation of a railroad is more subtle than that of dilapidated bridges. While curves don't have the potential for interrupting your commute with an early morning dip in the Hackensack, they do have a major impact on the speed and reliability of the system as a whole. If a curve is too sharp, a train can't go around it very fast without, as Mr. Caywood would say, having troubles. That's one big reason why Amtrak's Metroliners, which have a top speed capability of around 115 m.p.h. in a straight line, average only around 64 m.p.h. Other curves will allow trains to run at high rates of speed, but only by taking a high toll on the passengers' insides. Finally, the higher the speed and the sharper the curve, the greater the forces applied to the track and the more maintenance it needs.

For these reasons, the August 1977 plan included 212 curves that were to be "realigned"—either straightened, allowing higher speeds, or banked to reduce the rollercoaster effect on the passengers. That number has now been cut to 41, all of them mere bankings. The plans to actually short-cut severe bends were scotched because they would have required the track to leave Amtrak's right-of-way, necessitating expensive purchases of land. The "realignments" that are left will not save time; they will only smooth out some of the curves with high stomach-turning potential (high "jerk rates"). But the other curves, along with several that will now be banked instead of straightened, will still provide ample opportunities for nausea. And some major Amtrak bottlenecks—like the bend on the approach to the Bay View Bridge near Baltimore, where trains must slow to 30 miles per hour—will hardly be touched at all. (The biggest bottleneck on the whole corridor, the Baltimore Tunnel—built in 1873 and too narrow to handle a freight and a passenger train at the same time—was never even scheduled by FRA for replacement. The speed limit in the tunnel was recently lowered to 10 m.p.h. Under NECIP, its drainage and lighting will be improved.)

Of course, all the future maintenance that will be needed to patch up the bridges that aren't being replaced, and the curves that must bear higher loads, means that even the economy of the project's truncation may be questioned—to say nothing of the future passengers who will sit in idle trains while Amtrak crews do repair work. FRA has taken this factor into account, however—and *reduced* the number of maintenance bases along the corridor by 60 percent, against the advice of Amtrak's Japanese high-speed rail experts.

But what about the commuter's bottom line, namely how long it will take to get there? Congress knew what would attract riders to the trains, which is why they went so far as to write the projected trip times into the 4R Act itself. The goals they came up with weren't all that tough—2 hours and 40 minutes from Washington to New York averages out to around 85 m.p.h. including stops. For comparison, as recently as 1969 the Penn Central offered a nonstop train that beat this time by ten minutes.

But with all the curves that are staying curved, and the bridges left on the drawing

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boards, it's difficult to see how even these schedules will be met. In fact, they probably won't be, at least not on any steady basis. You won't catch the FRA admitting this—precisely because the trip times are written into law, the FRA has treated them as holy writ, even to the extent of justifying the project's "redirection" on the grounds that Amtrak will still be able to meet the statutory timetable.

"Trip times," however, are a more flexible concept than they might at first seem. A railroad can make any given train meet a tight schedule through a number of tricks—cutting out station stops (as in 1969), shunting all the other freight and passenger traffic onto sidetracks until the priority train rolls through. On the Northeast Corridor, this sort of scheduling can cut an hour from a Washington-N.Y. trip. But there's a big difference between having a few special trains meeting a tight schedule—in the process delaying all the other trains by making them step aside—and building a system where all trains can consistently meet that same timetable. It's a difference Amtrak is counting on. Even so, they're not signing anything in blood. As Reistrup testified: "I would hope, personally... that we should have at least a minimum number of schedules in the timetable, particularly in the business hours, let's say morning, noon, and evening, that would meet the 2 hour and 40 minute, 3 hour and 40 minute goals."

Given the fudge factor built into "trip times," the best gauge of how fast Amtrak's service will be is probably its "reliability standards," the measure of how many trains will actually meet the advertised schedules. So you should know that the reliability standards for the improved Northeast Corridor service have been steadily reduced, from "95-percent-within-five-minutes" when NECIP started, to the current hope that 85 percent of the trains will be no more than ten minutes late. But those are abstract statistics. To get a handle on them, it helps to know that the "85-10" reliability standard that will be used on the finished corridor is the same as the standard Amtrak uses now. Ask any rider what great service that is.

Finally, there is what happens beyond 1985. Congress was concerned about that future—remember those visions of 150-m.p.h. trains and the provisions in the 4R Act calling for "the accomplishment of... improvements in a manner compatible with accomplishments in the future of additional service levels"? The lawmakers may have been thinking of Japan's national railroad, which has been running trains at over 135 m.p.h. since the mid-sixties. Or the French—when their new Paris-Lyons line goes into service next year it will operate at speeds of 160 m.p.h. In 1978, a congressional committee asked DCP's Caywood about this statutory goal of future improvements. His response: "My interpretation of that is that there was an initial objective of hoping that we could design toward 150-miles-an-hour speed. These things have long gone by the board.... No major expansion of system capacity is planned at any point on the Corridor."

A Strange Electricity

But if the system can't expand its capacity for speed, surely it will expand its capacity for people. That, after all, is the point of the whole exercise: attracting an expected 26.4 million riders by 1990. But a chain, they say, is only as strong as its weakest link—and the weak link of the Northeast Corridor, as far as people-carrying capacity is concerned, is the antique electrification system running along the southern leg from New York to D.C. It uses electricity of a peculiar voltage that is produced by the railroad's own power plants. Electricity of this type isn't generated commercially anywhere else on earth. The system is extremely prone to failure—and it cannot handle the dramatic increase in passengers the NECIP project is designed to stimulate.

To cure this defect, the FRA had planned a new electrification system that could handle more power, higher speeds, and would be more reliable because it would draw current from nearby commercial grids. Guess what is not being built. Without the new system, those 26.4 million people won't be able to ride the trains in 1990 even if they want to. No doubt there will be appropriate, preprinted messages handed to them as they shuffle back to their cars and drive off onto the highways, burning up their precious $8-a-gallon gasohol: "Amtrak is undertaking major track rehabilitation on the Northeast Corridor... we regret any inconvenience...." ■

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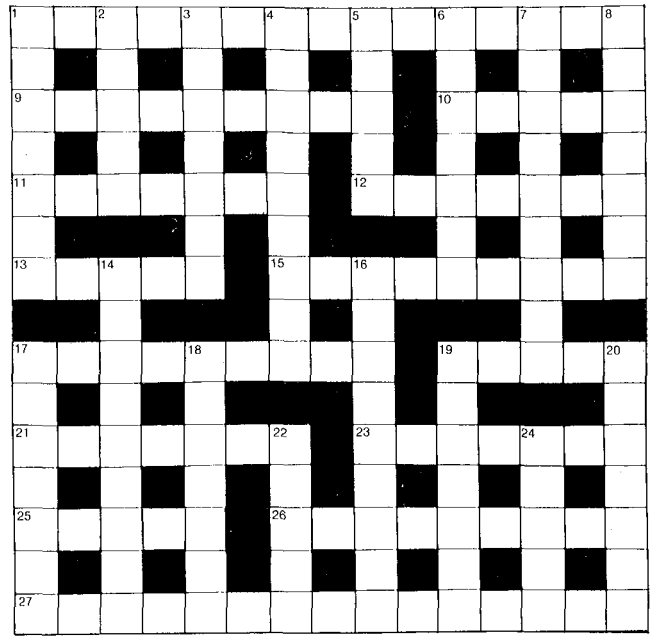
the political puzzle

by John Barclay



The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g., (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g., USA, are treated as one word.

Across

1 Book in which you share the wise strangely. (5,5,5)
9 Purveyor appears healthier? (9)
10 Performed 100 in odd date. (5)
11 More windy weather upsets tie rugs. (7)
12 Push in favor of very little thing? (7)
13 Remember fruits for days. (5)
15 Re: Eban tux: arranged with enthusiasm. (9)
17 June rider in spill is hurt again. (9)
19 Pack South America kit for Northern Island. (5)
21 Kennedy chief sets level in short streets. (7)
23 Judge calls her case *out of order*. (7)
25 Mayan site in *billet-doux* malfunction. (5)
26 Mercy! Gene can be very dangerous. (9)
27 Somehow hit the new dog, win a famous movie. (4,4,3,4)

Down

1 It's not McMahon imposed upon? (7)
2 Specks in chariot Assyrians used. (5)
3 Slice it one way, brings out another way. (7)
4 We rate our strange garments. (9)
5 Cut down the last of trips first. (5)
6 Eye Nora peculiarly at the start. (4,3)
7 An out-star weirdly attracts pioneer. (9)
8 The worst performance of Ted's district attorneys. (7)
14 Member merits ban in novel way. (9)
16 Experienced but certainly did not overcome! (9)
17 Antelope comes up after nap to be caught again.(7)
18 For John Q. Public Simpson comes up below strangely. (3,4)
19 Decorate lens gap in a fashion. (7)
20 Tried wandering sea days. (7)
22 Aura of money, we hear (5)
24 Capital invested in Afghan oil well. (5)

Answers to February's puzzle:

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Who's Who in the Carter Administration

Ordinarily we don't report congressional comings and goings in this section, but **Richard Perle** is different. If he did not officially exercise executive power, he was, from his seemingly obscure vantage point on the staff of the Senate Investigations Subcommittee, able to negate the efforts of recent administrations to pursue detente and arms control. In effect he was the anti-Secretary of State for SALT. If the Russians want to get SALT II back on track, now is their chance, because Perle has resigned. . . . When **Robert Griffin** became Robert Strauss's deputy two years ago, the conventional wisdom viewed his appointment as an attempt to appease Tip O'Neill, who had been furious when his friend Griffin was fired as the #2 man at the GSA during the scandals at that agency. The conventional wisdom, in this case, was right, and Carter probably would have been happy if Griffin had spent his entire time recreating Civil War battles with tin soldiers on his desk. Instead, however, Griffin used the same bureaucratic skills he had honed while covering up the GSA scandals to serve his bosses—Strauss, and later Sol Linowitz—and was instrumental in selling the multilateral trade bill to Congress. . . .

In

WHITE HOUSE

Press Secretary for the National Security Affairs Advisor—**Alfred Friendly, Jr.** has been a correspondent in Europe for the *New York Times* and a Moscow correspondent for *Newsweek*. He replaces Jerrold Schecter, who will work for Occidental Petroleum.

DEFENSE

Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs—**William Peacock** has been director of the Department of Energy's intergovernmental affairs office for the past three years.

EDUCATION

Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement—**F. James Rutherford** has been assistant director of science education at the National Science Foundation.

Undersecretary—**Steven Minter** has been associate director of the Cleveland Foundation.

Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education—**Albert Bowker** has been chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley.

Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education—**Thomas Minter** was a deputy commissioner in the U.S. Office of Education.

General Counsel—**Betsy Levin** has been a Duke University law professor.

HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Assistant Secretary for Human Development Services—**Cesar Perales** has been regional director for Region II in New York.

Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation—**John Palmer** has been principal deputy assistant secretary in the same division.

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Welfare Legislation—**Barry Van Lare** has been associate commissioner for family assistance in the Social Security Administration.

HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs—**Elizabeth Roistacher** is an associate economics professor on leave from the City University of New York.

JUSTICE

Acting Director of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration—**Homer Broome, Jr.** has been a deputy administrator of the LEAA.

Associate Deputy Attorney General—**Robert Keuch** has been a deputy assistant attorney general for the Criminal Division for the past four years.

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STATE

Ambassador to Mexico—**Julian Nava** has been special assistant to the president of California State University.

Ambassador to Bolivia—**Marvin Weissman** was ambassador to Costa Rica.

Ambassador to Mauritius—**Robert C.F. Gordon** is a career foreign service officer.

Ambassador to El Salvador—**Robert E. White** has been ambassador to Paraguay.

Ambassador to Turkey—**James Spain** has been ambassador to Tanzania.

Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research—**Ronald Spiers** has been ambassador to Turkey.

TREASURY

Acting Undersecretary for Monetary Affairs—**C. Fred Bergsten** has been assistant secretary for international affairs.

AGENCIES AND COMMISSIONS

International Communications Agency
Associate Director in charge of Voice of America—**Mary Bitterman** has been executive director and general manager of the Hawaii Public Broadcasting Authority since 1974.

Out

White House
Assistant to the Special Representative for Middle East Negotiations—**Robert Griffin** will work for Chrysler's Washington office.

Commerce
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environmental Affairs—**Sidney Galler** has retired.

Defense
Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs—**Robert Nelson** has resigned.

State
Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs—**C. William Maynes** will become editor of *Foreign Policy* magazine.

Agencies and Commissions

Community Services Administration
Director—**Graciela Olivarez** will return to her home in New Mexico.

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The American Prosecutor: A Search for Identity
Joan E. Jacoby, Bureau of Social Science Research, Inc.
336pp. ISBN 0-669-03291-3 $28.95

Conflict and Compromise in South Africa
edited by **Robert I. Rotberg,** Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and **John Barratt,** South African Institute of International Affairs
224pp. ISBN 0-669-03205-0 $22.50

Soviet Natural Gas Development to 1990
The Implications for the CMEA and the West
Jonathan P. Stern
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Rita J. Simon, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle
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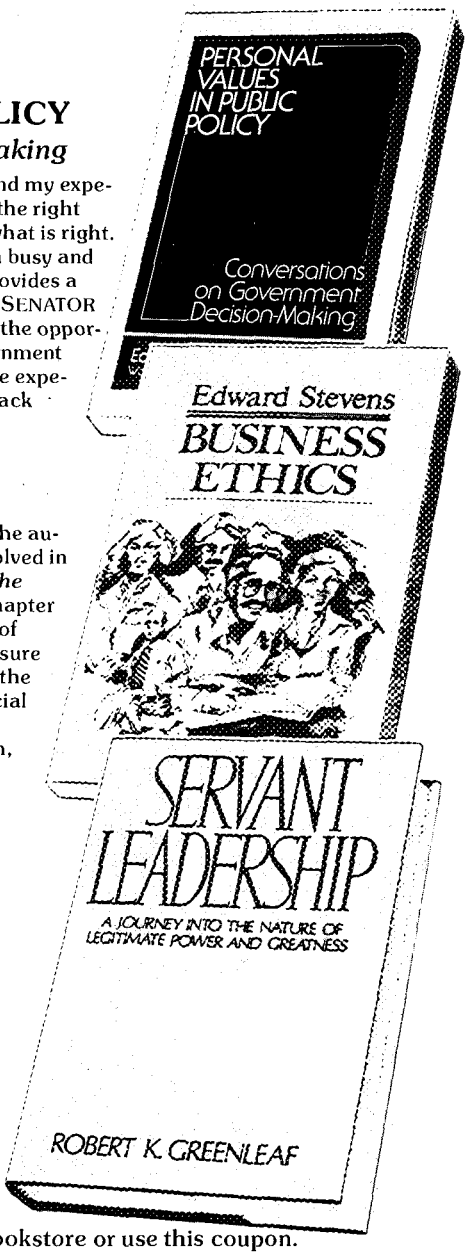

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political book notes

Public Affairs books to be published in April.

American Dream/Global Nightmare: The Dilemma of U.S. Human Rights Policy. *Sandy Vogelgesang. Norton, $13.95.*

The American Prosecutor: A Search for Identity. *Joan E. Jacoby. Lexington, $28.95.* The title of this book is misleading. Instead of "Catcher in the Rye: DA-Style," we get "How I spent my LEAA grant." Jacoby deserves credit, however, for focusing on the nuts-and-bolts of DA offices instead of on courtroom showmanship. The most useful sections are her comparisons of the prosecutors in New Orleans, Kansas City, and Boulder, Colorado. Although Jacoby thinks they are all doing fine, another conclusion is that if you're going to commit a crime, do it in Boulder. New Orleans' DAs will vigorously pursue your case only if they are certain to get a conviction. But the office also has a "post-conviction tracking unit," which might step in to oppose your parole application. In Kansas City, the policy is to keep the docket moving, dispose of cases as early as possible. Plea bargaining is pervasive, but justice is swift—the DA files charges within 20 hours after arrest. In prosperous, beautiful Boulder, however, the emphasis is on "sensitivity to the defendant." The community wants criminals to serve their terms locally, preferably in some sort of community service program, because, they believe, a person is "bummed out" returning to Boulder from the state penitentiary.

—James Lyons

Authority. *Richard Sennett. Knopf, $10.*

Death Row. *Bruce Jackson, Diane Christian. Beacon, $11.95.*

Farm and Food Policy: Issues of the 1980's. *Don Paarlberg. University of Nebraska, $16.50.*

How to Win Votes. *Edward N. Costikyan. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, $12.95.* Costikyan is a former Tammany leader who analyzes campaign techniques with humor and a healthy skepticism. He develops rules for campaigning, embellished with anecdotes drawn largely from his New York City experience. His conclusions are unsurprising, however: Anyone rich and vigorous enough (preferably residing in an area represented by an enfeebled incumbent of the majority party), who can persuade enough people to visit strangers in their homes over a year in advance of the election, who can articulate "new" approaches to old problems, and who can keep all of the above in motion many hours a day for many months (it helps to be unemployed) has a plausible shot at elective office. Being born to the right parents or famous in an unrelated field supercedes most of the above.

Less obviously, Costikyan targets the emerging non-voting majority as the key to electoral success in the 80s. As a graduate of the era of party machines who laments the demise of their local clubs and personal services, Costikyan is suitably optimistic about the potential for hooking the non-voter on the ballot habit. But he points out that constant polling by the candidates, and constant readjustment of their programs to match those polls, tend to reduce the distinctions between them, making the outcome of the election seem increasingly irrelevant—and encouraging voters to stay home.

—Pat Martin

In the Absence of Power. *Haynes Johnson. Viking, $12.95.* See "Richard Reeves on Political Books" in the February issue.

Kennedy and Roosevelt. *Michael R. Beschloss. Norton, $14.95.* Among the fascinating facts uncovered by the 23-year-old author of this book is that during the twenties, while Joseph Kennedy, Sr. was making his millions, FDR was also trying his hand in the business world—and displaying a flair for the flaky that was to remain unequaled until his son James launched his own career in commerce. But whether FDR was trying to corner the lobster market or Kennedy was manipulating RKO and Pathe, neither manifested zealous solicitude for the rights of the average investor. Who knows—it may have been guilt that led to the SEC, their one great joint venture.

If Kennedy was the better businessman, Roosevelt was clearly the better politician. He used Kennedy much more than Kennedy used him, shamelessly manipulating the Boston Irishman's desire for social respectability with empty honors like a largely ceremonial ambassadorship to the Court of St. James. It was an appointment that ended Kennedy's own political life, and made it necessary for him to live

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through his sons—for, by opposing aid to Britain in 1940, he earned the right to oblivion that belongs to those who are dead wrong at crucial moments in history.

—*Charles Peters*

Nuclear Power and Legal Advocacy. *Constance Ewing Cook. Lexington, $17.95.* Cook gives a thorough account of the uses of "legal advocacy" to stall, obstruct, and ultimately prevent the building of nuclear power plants. Among the lessons: It doesn't matter who wins the lawsuit. Given the possibilities for "lengthy regulatory hearings and subsequent litigation," the "impact of the duration of the judicial process has been as significant as the impact of actual court rulings." What's more, "it is likely that restrictive new legislation will contribute to the further use of legal advocacy, perhaps this time by both sets of interest groups." This should encourage the anti-nuclear forces—since the loser in these endless regulatory skirmishes is inevitably the side that wants to *do* something, Cook persuasively demonstrates that the mighty nuclear industry never had a chance against the array of ill-funded interest groups that took it to court. But the rest of us should be troubled, if we think that sometimes the government needs to get something accomplished quickly.

—*Robert M. Kaus*

On and Off the Floor: Thirty Years as a Correspondent on Capitol Hill. *Samuel Shaffer. Newsweek, $8.95.*

The Progressive Presidents: Roosevelt, Wilson, Roosevelt, Johnson. *John Morton Blum. Norton, $11.95.*

The Rise and Fall of the Shah. *Amin Saikal. Princeton, $14.50.* Nothing's more galling for a prophet than to be overtaken by your own forecasts. That's what happened to Amin Saikal, an Afghan-born political scientist who now teaches in Australia. In 1975, convinced that the Shah would someday be toppled, Saikal began working on a history of the regime. The prevailing view, of course, was that the Shah had things under control. Saikal amassed convincing evidence to the contrary. By the time he ran it all through his typewriter, however, Iran had long since been swept into the maelstrom. Saikal's scholarly tone makes for dry reading, but it's worth the effort, to help arrive at a better understanding of where all that fear and vitriol came from.

The Squeeze. *James Dale Davidson. Summit, $11.95.*

Sweden: The Middle Way on Trial. *Marquis W. Childs. Yale, $12.95.*

Three Farms: Making Milk, Meat and Money from the American Soil. *Mark Kramer. Atlantic-Little, Brown, $12.95.* Starting with a man who actually satisfies the romantic image of the farmer—gruff but kind, working dawn to dusk, fiercely independent—Kramer moves you across the landscape of American agriculture, finally arriving at the California agribusiness venture where machines do everything but the eating. Kramer lived on the farms he was researching, and it has paid off. He sees the sophistication with which a supposed rustic simpleton perfects the details of a cow-milking gallery. He empathizes with the agribusiness scientists who breed tomatoes for hardness so harvesting machines can't cut through them any more than your teeth can. This book is keenly and quietly written by a writer who has the knack for getting right up into the action, while maintaining enough distance to duck the combine arms.

—*Gregg Easterbrook*

The Ultimate Tyranny. *Eugene J. McCarthy. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $12.95.* In this hodgepodge of ideas, mostly inspired by his third-party campaign for president in 1976, McCarthy makes two convincing points: First, the Democrats and Republicans, wherever the courts let them, will gang up to rig the election laws against minor parties. Second, the federal campaign-financing laws have turned over our basic democratic processes to a bureaucracy of unusual incompetence and spinelessness.

McCarthy has great fun poking holes in the desperate attempts of the Federal Election Commission and the Federal Communications Commission to rationalize their two-party favoritism. But it is the fun of the crank litigant, too embedded in his righteous cause to understand the other side. What McCarthy won't admit is that in a sensible system, he would get his chance to run for president, but at some point candidates with only five- or six-percent support would be weeded out, letting the voters choose among those with enough votes to win. As it was, McCarthy might have split the liberal vote and thrown the election to Ford, so the desperate rationalizations of the Democrats were understandable.

The remainder of the book consists of a sometimes maddening series of musings on the Constitution, the press, and the bureaucracy (e.g. "the thrust of the 'negative income tax' concept is that all incomes should approach equality and, by projection, that all wealth should be equally distributed"). The climax comes when McCarthy, after 200 pages asserting his right to "affect the outcome of the election" and attacking "the intrusion of partisanship," laments the "irresponsible legislative actions" that stem from "the breakdown of party discipline."

—*R.M.K.*

Unrepentant Radical: An American Activist's Account of Five Turbulent Decades. *Sidney Lens. Beacon, $14.95.*

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FARM AND FOOD POLICY

Issues of the 1980s

By Don Paarlberg

Writing from years of experience near the center of agricultural power in Washington, Don Paarlberg focuses his considerable forecasting skills on the farm politics of the 1980s. Among the issues he examines are commodity programs, price control, the consumer movement, domestic food programs, the environmental movement, occupational safety and health, the use of land, water, and energy the decline of the family farm and the rise of agribusiness, the role of the Department of Agriculture, and international trade policy. A must for legislators, policymakers, farmers, consumers, and others with a direct stake in agricultural policy. **$16.50**

also of interest

The Politics of Justice

Lower Federal Judicial Selection and the Second Party System, 1829–61

By Kermit L. Hall

Hall analyzes a little-explored yet vital administrative function—the appointment of judges to the lower federal courts. He brings the methods of political science and political history to bear on his subject, then explores its ramifications for constitutional and legal history. **$19.50**

Agricultural Exports, Farm Income, and the Eisenhower Administration

By Trudy Huskamp Peterson

In an historical study of startling relevancy to today's policymakers, Peterson examines the Eisenhower administration's attempts to put a floor under farm income by expanding the foreign market for agricultural products. Particularly valuable for its focus on the bureaucratic structure of decision-making in trade policy and its evaluation of the use of agricultural surpluses as political weapons, this book is indispensable for students of agricultural trade policy. **$15.95**

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